

**RURAL AND URBAN
TEACHING EXPERIENCES OF
EIGHT PRAIRIE TEACHERS**

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Graduate Studies and Research
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By

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to describe rural and urban education from the perspective of teachers. Participant teachers reflected upon their rural and urban teaching experiences and described, through narratives and personal examples, various aspects of rural and urban education. Through this process, participants answered the research question: “What are the experiences and perspectives of teachers with respect to teaching in rural and urban environments?” Data were collected via semi-structured interviews which were used to help understand the lived experiences of the participants.

Based on this qualitative study, numerous characteristics of rural and urban education were highlighted. The participants indicated that rural schools were often closely linked to their community. As a result, many of these teachers could more easily individualize their instruction because they were familiar with the personal lives of their students. Within the rural schools highlighted in this study, lower enrolments and a smaller staff posed challenges, and a limited range of academic programs were offered. Student participation in extracurricular activities was more prominent in this study’s rural schools, and the expectations for teachers’ involvement in extracurricular activities and supervision were high.

As with rural education, when the participants described urban education, they emphasized the importance of building strong school-community relationships. Also, this research showed that the larger enrollments of the urban schools highlighted in this study meant these schools were responsible for a greater variety of student needs, both academically and socially. Classroom management was more of an issue for the urban teachers of this study, and the parents of their urban students were often less directly

involved within the school. Participants indicated, as urban teachers, they had more opportunities to specialize in their subject area and enjoyed easier access to professional development opportunities. The participants of this study described the academic abilities of urban students to be similar to those of rural students; however, the participants noted urban students to be open to a greater variety of future career choices.

There are similar issues surrounding education, whether rural or urban. This study highlighted this point in a number of ways. First this research reflected that close ties between school and community enhanced the pertinence of curriculum content. This indicates that schools need to take advantage of the academic, personal, and cultural resources provided within the community. Another central issue of this study indicated that a teacher's background and experience, as well as his or her knowledge of the student's and community's culture affected the way a teacher acts and handles various teaching situations. A final aspect of this study showed that the roles and responsibilities of teachers are diverse. A teacher assumes such roles as educator, counselor, social worker, consultant, coach, role model, and active community member.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Tony. You are the force behind my success. You are my inspiration and my rock. You are my love!

I thank you with all of me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When the name “Canada” is spoken, mental images are vividly formed. These images depict wide-open spaces peppered with rugged mountains, frozen icescapes, and vast prairie grasslands. Canada, the second largest country in the world, is one of the least populated countries; so much land for so very few people. It is not surprising that the rural way of life has had such an influence on Canadians, their lifestyles, their culture, and their education.

From the creation of Confederation in 1867, the dominant way of life in Canada was rural. Urban centers served as the necessary collection and delivery points for rural produce and imported supplies. In 1867, 80 percent of Canada’s population was rural (Gillis, 2004). Ever since then, the national rural population has been on the decline, with urban centers being the recipients of this changing demography. By 1921, Canada’s rural population had decreased to approximately 50 percent (MacKinnon, 1998; Wotherspoon, 1998), and by 1996, 22 percent of Canada’s population was labeled as rural (MacKinnon, 1998). The latest Canadian census (held in 2001) lists the total percentage of the national rural population as 20 percent (Statistics Canada, 2005). The transformation of population is clearly visible in Saskatchewan statistics as well. Between 1901 and 2001, Saskatchewan’s rural population declined from 84 percent of the total to 36 percent (Statistics Canada, 2005). In the last four decades, out of all the

Canadian provinces, Saskatchewan has experienced one of the most significant losses of rural population (Rothwell, Bollman, Tremblay, & Marshall, 2002).

Based on these data, it is clear that the Canadian landscape has undergone major changes as the rural population has decreased both nationally and provincially. The most common way of life within Canada is now urban. These days, people seldom talk about growth or advancements in the rural communities. Instead, the topics of rural conversations involve “making do”, “survival”, or “selling out”.

The fact that rural life is being transformed into urban is a concern of mine. It bothers me to see another small gas station and hardware store closing. The memory of the dusty collapse of my hometown’s grain elevator still haunts me. Many people are abandoning their rural origins and moving to the city lights, leaving behind a scatter of ghost towns. An urban existence is now the present-day choice of the majority of Canadian citizens.

With that said, there are still over six million people living in rural Canada, and we cannot assume that our rural population will disappear altogether, regardless of the dramatic decline. Education within both rural and urban environments are equally important, and we need to support our schools regardless of setting.

Definition of Rural

Explaining what constitutes “rural” is a difficult undertaking because a common definition of “rural” does not exist. Cross & Frankcombe (1994) stated, “There is no one definition of what rural is, so there are a number of types of rurality” (p. 14). Stern (1992) agreed, “Indeed, few issues bedevil analysts and planners concerned with rural education more than the question of what actually constitutes rural” (p. 72). Global

leaders and corporations cannot agree upon a uniform definition, and, closer to home, Canadians cannot agree on a standardized definition, either. Indeed, much ambiguity exists about what constitutes “rural” (Nachtigal, 1982; Rintoul, 1999; Wallin, 2003).

Recently, Statistics Canada and the Rural Secretariat analyzed the many ways in which Canada has utilized the term “rural” for national documents and research (de Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson, 2001). The outcome of their analysis is descriptions of six main definitions of rural (de Plessis et al., 2001, p. 7):

1. *Census rural areas*: individuals living outside of places of 1,000 people or more OR outside places with densities of 400 or more people per square kilometer.
2. *Rural and small town (RST)*: individuals living in towns or municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centers (population of 10,000 or more).
3. *Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) rural communities*: individuals in communities with less than 150 persons per square kilometer. This includes the individuals living in the countryside, towns, and small cities (inside and outside the commuting zone of larger urban centers).
4. *Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predominantly rural regions*: individuals living in census divisions with more than 50 percent of the population living in OECD rural communities. This includes all census divisions without a major city.

5. *Non-metropolitan regions*: individuals living outside metropolitan regions with urban centers of 50,000 or more population.
6. *Rural postal codes*: individuals with a “0” as the second character in their postal codes.

Each of these definitions emphasizes different rural criteria including population numbers, population density, labor market, or settlement area. The problem still arises, however, when researchers and literature describing rural situations neither imply nor explicitly state the meaning of “rural” to which they refer. Because of the various explicit and implicit definitions of “rural” used throughout research on rural environments, it is difficult to compare information. The rural research available, for the most part, does not provide information pertaining to the degree of isolation or remoteness, specific population numbers, nor does it give any particulars about the infrastructure of the community or services that might be available in communities nearby. However, it would be foolhardy to disregard information because exact definitions of “rural” do not coincide. Although the specific characteristics of “rural” may vary, in general, each definition provides similar data about demographics, and researchers maintain that rural settings and rural education have defining attributes. Therefore, when reviewing the literature, the term “rural” must be recognized as representing a spectrum of characteristics.

Statistics Canada (de Plessis et al., 2001) is trying to alleviate the problems associated with the various delineations of rural. Statistics Canada recommends that the “rural and small town definition (RST)” be used for research. Therefore, for the purpose of my thesis, I will utilize this RST definition of rural: “individuals living in towns or

municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centers (population of 10,000 or more)”).

Definition of Urban

Logically, the definition of “rural” should clarify the definition of “urban”. Fortunately, this is the case when one utilizes the RST definition of rural. For example, for research purposes Statistics Canada (2003) defines “rural” as any center with less than 10,000 people, and “urban” as any center over 10,000 people.

It is important to point out that Statistics Canada further refines its definition of “urban” through the use of two descriptors. The first urban descriptor used by Statistics Canada is identified as a Census Agglomeration (CA). “A CA has an urban core of 10,000 to 99,999 and includes all neighboring municipalities where 50 percent or more of the work force commutes into the urban core” (Mendelson & Bollman, 1996, p. 2). The second urban descriptor is identified as a Census Metropolis Area (CMA). “A CMA has an urban core of 100,000 or over and includes all neighboring municipalities where 50 percent or more of the work force commutes to the urban core” (Mendelson & Bollman, 1996, p. 2). Thus, in accordance with the rural definition, urban includes CMA and CA populations.

Statistics Canada is formally reviewing its definition of CMA because it questions whether the requirement for an urban core of 100,000 is too restrictive, and consequently excludes many CAs which are metropolitan in nature. For the 2006 census, Statistics Canada will redefine CMAs to include those CA whose urban cores are 50,000 or more and whose metropolitan area has a total population of at least 100,000 (Statistics Canada, 2003). This change in criteria is a response to developing a more inclusive definition of

CMAs. Presently within Canada, there are 39 urban areas labeled as CMAs, and hundreds of others labeled CA (Butler, 2003). With future changes in the definition of CMAs, the number of Canadian CMAs will increase in the next 2006 Canadian census.

Personal Definition of Rural

As explained above, the formal definition of rural used for my thesis will be: “individuals living in towns or municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centers (population of 10,000 or more)” (de Plessis et al., 2001, p. 7). However, because of my rural background, I realize that this simple definition of rural does not fully describe what it really means to live in “country” surroundings. Defining rural does not merely mean quoting numbers; rather a fuller, richer description is needed if the true meaning of rural is to be comprehended.

Because each rural area is unique, it is difficult to describe what it is like to live in a typical “rural” community. When describing my own hometown, several things come to mind. My town is a small agricultural community with an aging population. The values and views of my hometown and surrounding area are somewhat conservative, and for the most part, the community is proud of its “traditional” way of life. The church, at the edge of town, is one of the focuses of the community and celebrates festive events such as weddings, Bible camps, and bazaars. The kindergarten to grade 12 school is another central part of the community, and the school’s sports events, drama nights, and Christmas concerts are attended by much of the community’s population. The community’s predominantly German ancestry makes polkas, sauerkraut, and “auf wiedersehen” very popular within the area. My hometown evokes images of honest,

hard-working people enjoying a simple lifestyle. People know their neighbours, and they attempt to care for and look after one another.

As well, my personal definition of rural lives within my memories. My rural memories include freshly baked bread, a lazy dog on the front porch, a rush of activity through the squeaky screen door, a herd of cows grazing in the pasture outside the kitchen window, a large potato garden planted behind the tree shelter, a deep freeze full of home-grown vegetables, one yard light illuminating a ten-foot radius, a decrepit outhouse partially hidden in the trees, the smell of leather and horse manure in the barn, snow angels lying across the yard, and the excitement of seeing a car come up the driveway. My memories include a sanctuary of a simple way of life within a paint-peeled little house. As the wind blows across the prairies and as time passes, things change. However, my memories of rural living will never be eroded.

When comparing my rural memories to literature depicting rural environments, some similarities do arise. Most rural people live their lives in a given location and are highly dependent upon the economics and business development of the catchment area (Hilty, 2002). In addition, rural people are said to be more self-sufficient. As Theobald (1997) stated, rural people are “intradependent”, meaning they “exist by virtue of necessary relations *within* [italics original] a place” (p. 7). People in rural areas often have less disposable income and less formal education than those in urban areas (Cartwright & Allen, 2002; Hilty, 2002).

It is important to note, that many of these general aspects of rural communities are in the process of change. For example, the incorporation of communication technology, such as the Internet, into rural areas means that rural communities are no longer isolated,

and rural people are well-informed about current issues. As well, changes in economics, such as innovative and bigger farm machinery, have caused extensive transformation to rural communities. Children are migrating from their hometowns in search of jobs and higher education, and many rural citizens now drive to the cities to do the vast majority of their shopping. Forming this new relationship with the city brings the “ways of the city” into the rural areas, shrinking the boundaries of what we call “the rural community”.

So what is left of rural origins? Have they merely blended into suburbia?

For many reasons, most people in Saskatchewan are rural in origin. Whether living in urban areas such as Regina or Prince Albert, many Saskatchewan dwellers have some connections to the rural aspect of life, as described above. The face-paced life in Saskatoon is slow when compared to the hustle of international cities such as Toronto, New York or Tokyo. Really, Saskatchewan cities are like big rural towns, when compared with such national or international urban standards. For example, within any Saskatchewan city, it is common to bump into a friend or family member when shopping. Every weekday at noon, the grain and pig prices are broadcasted across city radio stations, and many post-secondary institutions have programs relating to agriculture and farming. The provincial economy is directly affected by the welfare and success of Saskatchewan farmers. In many ways, Saskatchewan people, whether rural or urban, experience a rural way of life and have a small-town mentality.

In this thesis, I utilize the empirical definitions of rural and urban. However, I will bear in mind that the rural and urban information I collect will also contain a localized version of rural and urban definitions. As stated above, such a realization (or subjectivity) will contribute to the value of my research.

Purpose and Importance of Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the differences between rural and urban education as experienced by teachers. In general, much has been written about rural and urban education. In fact, such American journals as “*Rural Educator*” and “*Urban Education*” specifically subscribe to issues perceived as pertaining to specifically rural or urban educational content. There is much information available which delineates and describes American rural education. As well, there is an abundance of research regarding American urban education, which often describes inner city schools and ESL programs for Hispanic immigrants. However, within this array of information, little research has been completed juxtaposing the actual experiences of Canadian rural and urban teachers. In addition, there is little written which describes similarities and differences between schools. There is a need for a better understanding of the unique characteristics of Canadian rural and urban education and a description of experiences teachers have in these environments.

Research Question

The following research question guides this study: What are the experiences and perspectives of teachers with respect to teaching in both rural and urban environments?

Researcher Background

I spent the entirety of my youth as a citizen of a rural community. During this time, I lived on a farm and was actively involved with my parents’ dairy, hog, and grain business. I have always regarded rural communities as the backbone of a Saskatchewan way of life. An individual who has been raised in a rural community is personally and/or culturally linked to most members of that community. Thus, the entire rural community

is, in fact, an extended family of the individual. Anyone living in a rural community holds a type of “community passport” which provides that individual with a secure sense of belonging - a definition of who he/she is. Rural communities nurture a unique culture, one in which the social welfare of the community and its people is high on its list of responsibilities. With all of this stated, I believe in the promotion and sustainability of rural communities, because as pockets of rural life slip away, one part of the unique definition of “being Canadian” dies as well.

Tempered by the above statement, I recognize the benefits of urban living. Although presently I am living in a rural environment, for the majority of my adult life I have resided and taught in urban surroundings around the world. Urban living has taught me to be more accepting of international cultures and global views and issues. Living in close proximity to one’s neighbor has taught me that what I do has a direct, and often instant, effect on those around me. As urban centers are on the global increase and as our world population reaches 6.5 billion, reinforcing “socially profitable” urban living is of paramount importance. The healthy promotion and sustainability of urban communities is an important concern of any country.

Glesne (1999) commented that a researcher’s subjectivity can contribute to the success of his or her research. Such is the case in my situation. Because I was and am an active member of a rural community both personally and professionally, I have inside knowledge and understanding of the cultures and lifestyles of some rural communities within Saskatchewan and Alberta. With this background I can more fully comprehend and analyze the responses made by rural participants. As well, because I have lived and taught in urban surroundings for the past ten years, I also have inside knowledge of the

culture and lifestyles of some urban centers. These experiences, or subjectivities, in turn, assisted me as I analyzed the data provided by rural and urban participants.

Overview of Thesis

In this study, I describe the experiences of teachers who have taught in both rural and urban schools. In Chapter 1, I introduce the research topic by giving the historical background of rural and urban communities in Canada and Saskatchewan. As well, the definitions of rural and urban are clarified, and the purpose and significance of the research are explained. Within this chapter, I also explain my background as a researcher and further explore personal definitions of rurality and urbanization.

In Chapter 2, I provide a synthesis of the literature and research on rural and urban education and its peripheries. The literature review attempts to focus upon information specifically related to Canadian rural and urban environments.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research paradigm used in this study. I describe the set-up of this study, the method of data collection used, and how the data was analyzed. As well, ethical considerations are outlined in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, participant selection criteria is described a short biography of each participant is given. Then an aggregative narrative, which exemplifies rural and urban teaching experiences is presented, and the findings of my research are explained. The data, focusing on rural and urban education, are further discussed and reviewed. A summary of the chapter is given.

In Chapter 5, I provide an analysis of the data within three themes: school and community, experience and identity, and coach and confidante. I present my own rural

and urban teaching stories which are representative of these themes. The chapter concludes with a short summary.

In the final chapter, Chapter 6, the research question is answered, recommendations highlighted from this research are listed, questions are framed for future research, and a final reflection is presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter is divided into the sections: “The Teaching Experience”, “Setting the Rural-Urban Scene”, “Rural Education”, “Urban Education”, and “Success Rates for Rural and Urban Students”. The first part of this chapter describes the teaching profession and explains how a teacher’s past experiences both professional and personal affect his or her teaching, whether in a rural or urban school. The next sections of this chapter discuss the specifics of rural and urban education. Many aspects of rural and urban education are compared and contrasted.

The Teaching Experience

The experience of becoming a teacher starts early in life and is affected by the environment in which a person is raised. Ritchie and Wilson (2000) believed that learning to become a teacher includes the many hours spent as a student watching teachers in the pre-kindergarten to grade 12 classrooms. From this experience, the identity of a teacher is born. Huberman (1993) explained that the identity of experienced teachers is actually dependent upon a teacher’s background, biography, and past teaching experiences. Teacher identity is something that is in constant flux and is dependent upon past, present, and future situations (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996).

In addition to identity, when talking about a teaching experience, it is also vital to reflect upon school-community relationships. To have effective school-community

relationships, the roles and responsibilities of teaching are vast. The following section further expands upon these aforementioned details of “the teacher experience”.

Becoming a Teacher

Throughout Canada, post-secondary teacher preparation programs entitle successful graduates to enter the teaching profession (Parkay, Hardcastel-Stanford, Vaillancourt, & Stephens, 2005). Ritchie and Wilson (2000) labelled teacher preparation programs as a “deliberate apprenticeship”. It is during this “deliberate apprenticeship” that teacher candidates *supposedly* acquire the theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed to be an effective teacher. Ritchie and Wilson (2000) argued that an “accidental apprenticeship” plays a much more significant role than the “deliberate apprenticeship” in determining how teacher candidates perform in the classroom environment. They described this “accidental apprenticeship”:

This other apprenticeship is longer, extending from preschool to young adulthood.

This other apprenticeship is more pervasive, involving almost every class these students have taken, almost every teacher with whom they have interacted, and countless media representatives of teaching and schooling. Finally, this other apprenticeship is more powerful. (pp. 29-20)

Ritchie and Wilson (2000) believed that it is not post-secondary preparation courses that are most influential for beginning teachers. Instead, it is more likely that prior preschool to grade 12 school experiences determine what students do as teachers and who they believe themselves to be as teachers. Goodson (1992) agreed with this point and stated “the teachers’ own experiences *as pupils* [original italics] are not only important training periods, but in many cases *more* [original italics] important” (p. 13). This means students

learn a great deal about pedagogical practices by observing their teachers' behaviours and instructional methods.

Not only is the educational background of a teacher important, so is the personal background. "In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching it is crucial we know about the person the teacher is" (Goodson, 1981, p. 69). Knowles (1992) believed the biography of a teacher has a significant bearing upon the classroom behaviors and practices of teachers. He argued that understanding the origins of a teacher perspective on education is largely a product of understanding his or her biography. In other words, "Teachers' previous *life experience and background* [italics original] help shape their view of teaching and are essential elements in their practice" (Goodson, 1992, p. 243). In addition, teachers need time to reflect upon their beliefs about teaching and determine how their biographies affect their ideologies of education. Ritchie and Wilson (2000) stated that if teachers are not given time to self-analyze, they will not be able to see the pros and, more specifically the conflicts of their perspectives. As a result, these teachers will be more likely to resist such things as new theories and pedagogical practices.

Teacher Identity

Huberman (1993) believed the way teachers approach teaching is grounded by their backgrounds, their biographies, and past teaching experiences, all of which form their identity. The identities we have reflect various facets of our life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), and, each person, therefore, has many identities. For example, a man would be identified by his daughter as "dad", but by his students as "teacher". Bitzman (1992) defined identity as "how the self is produced and reproduced through social

interactions, daily negotiations, and within particular contexts that are already overburdened with the meanings of others” (p. 23). Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) believed experiences, past, present, and future, shape teacher identity. Bitzman (1994) claimed that a teacher’s identity describes who a teacher is, who he or she is not, and who he or she can become. It is important to stipulate that identity is not fixed. Because teachers must constantly reinvent who they are as they develop insights into their teaching (Meyer & Nore, 1999), “identity must be forever re-established and negotiated” (Sachs, 1999, p. 155). Bitzman (1992) argued that it is impossible to discuss identity without exploring teacher experience and reflection on the meanings the teachers give to these experiences. “Learning to teach is not a linear process...Teaching is a deeply contextualized profession, in which experiences both shape the learner and must be continuously reexamined and interrogated” (Buchanan, 1994, p. 52).

The Teacher and the Community

Every teaching experience is a product of enculturation and membership of a particular culture (Tolley, 2003). That is, the type of experience a teacher has within the classroom is dependent upon how well the teacher understands the culture of the community. In other words, classroom instruction and activities are negatively affected when teachers know little about the community in which they teach. Research indicated that teachers teach more effectively when they understand their students’ home lives and home communities and utilize this information within their curriculum and teaching pedagogy (Asselin, 2001; Taylor, D., 1993). Theobald (1997) emphasized that the curriculum is not simply synonymous with information. There needs to be linkage

between the school and the broader community purposes; a way of grounding curriculum and instruction in the civic and economic life of a community (Howley & Howley, 2003).

Successful teaching is determined by the relationships the teacher has with students, parents, colleagues, administration, and other members of the school community (Parkay et al., 2005). To create and sustain effective relationships with these groups, teachers must be attentive to beliefs, norms, and practices of the communities in which they teach. Positive relationships and interactions between the school and the community are a vital component of a quality education. Chance (2002) believed that when a school and community collaborate, a “greater” community is the result. This greater community is about a group of people who share similar values regarding its youth and their potential future. The concept of greater community is also a reflection of geography, membership, and affiliation. The school and community represent a shared sense of belonging and community focus; community members are partners in the educational process of their children. This means that “teachers and parents do not exist in separate worlds but are united with others in the community into a milieu of common purpose and direction” (Chance, 2002, p. 233).

Strong school-community relationships are an integral part of Deweyian philosophies. Dewey believed the school is a representation of society (1899), democratic citizens are the result of quality education (1916), and the student’s social needs to be the basis for his or her learning (1902; 1938). Dewey’s ideas imply that teachers need to interact with parents and community members if they want to recognize and teach within the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional range of their students. Freire (1970) and Vygotsky (as cited by Moll, 1990) also insisted that there is a need to

involve community interests if pertinent meanings are to be given to schooled concepts. Levine and Lezotte (1995) believed if parents, extended family members, community members, teachers, and administrators collaboratively work together to support a child's learning, the child will be more successful in whatever he or she attempts.

School^{PLUS} is an example of how schools and communities are working together to provide quality education. The term "School^{PLUS}" was first used by a Saskatchewan provincial Task Force (chaired by Michael Tymchak) which described the new role of schools in light of present-day societal challenges and changes. The School^{PLUS} philosophy assumes the school is the center of the community and should therefore be the hub of services and supports for the community's students and families (*School^{PLUS}: Community-teacher Engagement Fund: Criteria and Guidelines, 2003-2004*).

School^{PLUS} promotes students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members to closely work together with public services to provide Saskatchewan youth with educative, social, emotional, and physical needs (Saskatchewan Learning, n.d. a).

Schools reflective of the School^{PLUS} philosophy are often open beyond the traditional school day to provide such things as tutoring for students, classes for adults, recreational opportunities, and health and social services. To provide these services, school and community members volunteer and sponsor many of these events. Through these examples, education becomes a partnership of and for school and community.

This connection between school and society is of vital importance (Chomsky, 2000). Schools are social; they are places where the young learn to participate intelligently and constructively in Canada's society (Parkey, Hardcastle-Stanford, Vaillancourt, & Stephens, 2005). A democratic country can only thrive when its citizens

are engaged in the continual process of education (Chomsky, 2000; Giroux, 2005; Fullan, 1999).

The Many Facets of Teaching

To be a teacher means to enter a profession that involves the acceptance of many roles. Cook-Sather (2006) said, “A role is a part, a function, a prescribed piece in a performance, or the expected behavior or participation in a social interaction” (p. 188). The word “role” connotes a set of duties as defined by a system in which a person acts (Skidmore, 1975). Harden and Crosby (2000) identified some of the formal roles of a teacher as being a learning facilitator, role model, curriculum planner, resource developer, and assessor. Through these roles, the teacher is engaged in instructing, disciplining, monitoring, assessing, and interacting with many students all of whom have diverse personalities, interests, and academic abilities.

The roles of the teacher are multidimensional and extend outside the classroom. To be a teacher is to serve students, the school, and the community (Parkay et al., 2005). Teaching is about building relationships with various members of the school and community (Clandinin, 1986). Teachers are counselors, coaches, career advisers, after-school tutors, and often serve on community committees, for example. All of these roles and responsibilities are an integral component of the teaching experience and assist in nurturing and ensuring positive interpersonal relationships with students and community members.

It is difficult to stipulate what the specific responsibilities of any given teacher will be. Teaching tasks vary according to needs of the school and community. However, whether a teacher is employed within a rural community or urban community does have

influence on the teaching experience. In the next sections, I will take a closer look at characteristics of rural and urban education.

Setting the Rural-Urban Scene

As stated in Chapter 1, the percentage of people living in rural surroundings within Canada is on the decline and has been for the past hundred years. A major contributing factor to this rural depopulation is youth migration (De Young, 1994; Sullivan, 2000), particularly of young skilled adults (Government of Canada, 2001a). Tremblay (2001) indicated that between 1971 and 1996, all provinces lost youth from their rural areas. Saskatchewan and the Atlantic Provinces suffered the greatest losses of their youth population, most of whom failed to return (Geroge, 2004; Tremblay, 2001). Studies reveal that of all the individuals who move out of their rural communities, 20 percent, at most, return within ten years (Dupuy, Mayer, & Morissette, 2000; George, 2004). Although some rural communities experience an immigration of older adults (Dupuy et al., 2000; Tremblay, 2001), this group is outnumbered by the younger population migrating from rural communities (Tremblay, 2001). These signs indicate that the youth are abandoning their rural community homesteads for the opportunities provided in urban centers.

An underlying pressure reinforcing rural depopulation is the decline in rural career opportunities (Collins, Press, & Galway, 2003) and, conversely, the increase in white collar opportunities found mainly in urban areas. Advances in commercialization, automation, and technology greatly affect rural employment interests in such areas as farming, fishery, and mining (Hathaway, 1993; MacKinnon, 1998; Wotherspoon, 1998). Within the agricultural sector, the modern farm has become big business. Farmers are

aggressively expanding and tending larger tracts of land in an effort to successfully compete on the world markets. In doing so, general business management principles such as cost control, cost efficiency, and mechanization have become pertinent to farmers and their agricultural businesses. Aligned with this point is the fact that while the average number of farms has drastically decreased, the average acres per farm have increased. Canadian farms today are, on average, 22 percent larger than they were 20 years ago (Canadian Federation of Agriculture, 2005). Farms have expanded in order to survive, and fewer people are needed to work the land (MacKinnon, 1998). Hence, there is a reduction in the number of jobs available within the rural community (Wotherspoon, 1998). De Young (1994) supported this point by stating: “Most modern farming is really ‘agribusiness,’ meaning that fewer and fewer people are actually engaged in farming even as crop yields rise” (p. 230).

This rural employee decline is seen not only in farming, but it is also reflected throughout the fishing industry in Newfoundland and within mining and forest industries throughout Canada. The demand for improved production by the economics of trade has made the utilization of technology and automation mandatory in many business areas. The end result, as stated above, is a decrease in the number of employees needed, especially in the farming, fishing, mining, and forestry industries.

Exacerbating the decrease in the number of jobs available in rural areas, the expansion of urban areas has introduced a rising demand for personnel. For example, tradesmen are needed to build new homes and business centers, workers are needed to staff production lines, managers are needed to lead business ventures, and bankers are

needed to finance this growth. The end result is rural individuals are being attracted to urban centers.

Many rural economies lack diversity, and, once again, the urban centers are a magnet for the young, ambitious, and educated populace. Due to globalization, rural areas are no longer insulated from international competition and, as a result, rural economic bases have become very fragile. For example, farmers now need to compete against national and international farmers who have been subsidized, who have a lower cost of labour, or who have product diversification. In the last 20 years, international supply and demand fluctuations, exchange rate changes, and interest rates have had profound effects on the sustainability of rural economies (Kearney, 1994).

Adding to an economic decline is the aging rural population, which is also threatening the existence of rural communities and their schools. Kearney (1994) explained:

Economic decline in rural areas has affected the amount of money that can be raised through local property tax levies. The “graying” of rural America also has implications for school levies, since older district residents typically don’t have school-age children and (therefore) don’t have a vested interest in community schools. (p. 11)

As illustrated above, the viability of the rural area is directly affected by its aging populace.

A final reason for rural decline may be found within the walls of the rural school itself. Educational demands and expectations of rural communities are often at odds with the school curricula (Wright 2003). Hathaway (1993) stated, “Provincial curricula

prepare students for high-tech urban lifestyles, to be implemented in urban ways” (p. 6). In other words, rural students often progress through the educational system in a stream leading to non-rural compatible careers, thus reinforcing the exodus of youth to the cities. The educational system may be more successful in its ability to provide its young citizens with the talents and skills needed outside the rural community rather than the talents and skills needed to contribute to the revitalization of home communities (Harmon, 1999; Wotherspoon, 1998). In an effort to prevent this occurrence, Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) suggested, “The curriculum must grow out of real issues important to students and the people of a particular community” (p 135), and the curriculum must engage in learning that is pertinent towards the survival of that community.

Saskatchewan’s education is reflective of Theobald and Nachtagal’s suggestions. Saskatchewan Learning makes provisions within kindergarten to grade 12 programs for “locally-determined options” (Atkinson, 1997). Locally-determined options are courses and curricula which are created by teachers and community members, which are then approved by Saskatchewan Learning (Atkinson, 1997). These courses reflect the specific interests and needs of a school and/or community.

As a culmination of the above issues, rural education is undergoing a substantial change, and many rural schools are closing. This point is particularly apparent in Saskatchewan. In 1940, Saskatchewan rural schools numbered around 5,000. By 1989, that number was 863, a decrease of 500 percent (Marud, 1991). Within surviving rural schools, smaller classes mean fewer teachers are needed. This, in turn, means classes need to be consolidated. Small schools soon become financially inefficient and burden

local taxpayers because per pupil operating expenses are comparably too high (Kearney, 1994). Finally, and ultimately, there are school closures.

Within education, Saskatchewan is attempting to deal with these demographic changes, and on the forefront of Saskatchewan's educational reform is the belief that all children regardless of age, gender, cultural background, or socioeconomic status have the right to appropriate educational opportunities (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1993). However, declining enrollments and financial restraints are a present-day reality of the situation, and demands for increased efficiency and equity of opportunity have necessitated restructuring or amalgamating within the educational system (Langlois & Scharf, 1991; Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, 1993).

Within Canada, all provinces have recently reduced the number of school boards. Prince Edward Island started the modern-day "trend" to amalgamate. In 1994, Prince Edward Island reduced its school boards from five to three. Since then all other provinces have followed by significantly reducing their number of school divisions (Bangsung, 2003). As of January 2006, Saskatchewan's previous 82 school divisions amalgamated into 40 (Bean, 2004). According to some educational leaders, one of the reasons for the construction of new and bigger school districts is related to the sustainability of rural schools. Amalgamation is a fairer means of distributing the educational taxes between poor and wealthy pockets of the province. Proponents believe amalgamations will produce operational and administrative savings (CUPE, n.d.) which, in turn, can be partially redirected into attempting to maintain schools. As well, the Saskatchewan government announced that there is a moratorium on school closures

during the transition period from September 2004 to December 2006 (Bean, 2004).

During this time, no schools will close regardless of declining numbers.

Opponents of amalgamation claim the opposite to be the outcome: the consolidation of school divisions will, in fact, contribute to the closure of many rural schools (Howley & Eckman, 1997). Amalgamation ultimately leads to a loss of community and school identity and reduces the importance of small schools. Eventually the voice of these small schools fades and school closures follow. Whether amalgamations are a partial or an inclusive reason for the diminishing numbers of rural schools, the facts remain the same: rural schools are decreasing in number.

Rural Education

There are many characteristics unique to rural education, and, as compared to an urban education, receiving a rural education can be both an advantage and disadvantage. These issues are described below.

Rural Strengths

Ironically, perhaps one of the greatest advantages of a rural school is its size. Paul Theobald, a leading scholar in rural education, stated that instead of consolidating or closing small schools, more schools should be built, and they should be small (Howley & Eckman, 1997). According to Howley and Eckman (1997), the small rural school and the way it is run should be used as a model for the way in which all new schools should be built and used. Howley and Eckman (1997) claimed the potential negative effects of overly large schools has spawned a movement toward creating “schools-within-schools” where pockets of small-school communities are established within the large schools. For example, students and teachers are divided into groups across grades and programs, and

they are assigned to special areas or wings within the school building. This type of setup provides opportunities for the students and teachers to interact more frequently and, thereby, develop stronger bonds (Leonard, Leonard, & Sackney, 2001).

The research revealing the advantages of rural education is extensive (Cross & Frankcombe, 1994; Howley & Eckman, 1997; Kearney, 1994; MacKinnon, 1998; Morgan & Alwin, 1980; Nachtigal, 1992; Newton & Knight, 1993; Ronan-Herzog & Pittman, 1995; to name a few). Although there are many descriptions given to rural education and rural schools, one common issues to which these authors refer is size and the fact the most rural schools are small. “Due to criteria variation across jurisdictions, there is no definitive explication of just what constitutes ‘small’ school” (Leonard et al., 2001, p. 79). However, rural schools are almost always labeled as small, and many repercussions arise because of school size. First, because of smaller class sizes, individualized instruction is more easily implemented within rural schools (Collins, 1999; Newton, 1993; Stephens & Bhaerman, 1992; Sullivan, 2000; Warick, 2006). As well, the instructional methods utilized in rural classrooms are more likely to be learner-centered and/or have an emphasis on cooperative learning (Kearney, 1994). Because of the dynamics of rural schools, teachers are better able to integrate curriculum concepts across multiple subjects (Newton, 1993). Overall, teachers in rural schools are able to give their students more attention, are more aware of each student’s talents and needs, and are better able to integrate subject areas.

Studies show that students enrolled in rural schools participate in more extra-curricular activities (Crockett et al., as cited in Government of Canada, 2001a; Kearney, 1994; Newton, 1993; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Saskatchewan School Boards

Association, 2004; Stephens & Bhaerman, 1992). Morgan and Alwin's (1980) investigation of rural students revealed a negative correlation between school size and student participation. Morgan and Alwin's research concluded students enrolled in small high schools participate in a greater number of activities and are more highly involved in each activity than are students in large high schools. Baker and Gump (as cited by Kearney, 1994; as cited by Nachtigal, 1992) conducted a five-year comprehensive study of 52 high schools situated in both rural and urban settings. In this study, Baker and Gump found that extra curricular participation is 3 to 20 times greater in small schools than in larger schools, and extra curricular participation peaks in high schools with enrollments between 61 and 150. Even though large urban schools have more extra curricular offerings, individual students who attend rural schools participate in a greater variety of extracurricular activities. As one Saskatchewan rural principal stated: "On our [extracurricular] teams, there are no cuts. Everyone gets to play" (Warick, 2006, p. E1).

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association (2004) stated students in rural schools come to school more often. As well, much literature stipulates the dropout rate is less in rural schools (Kearney, 1994; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2004; Stephens & Bhaerman, 1992; Wilson, 1996). One reason for lower dropout rates in rural schools may be related to the school climate. Rural schools provide more opportunities to participate in academic and non-academic activities, regardless of talent. Pittman and Haughwout (1987) explained that small schools are more successful at fostering a sense of student responsibility towards school. Such factors pressure students to participate in school activities, which, in turn, enhance the overall climate and reputation of the school.

According to Tinto's (1975) model of dropout behaviors, the school's ability to create student responsibility reduces the likelihood of students leaving "their" school.

Nachtigal (1992) added an important aspect to this discussion. Nachtigal agreed the dropout rates are lower in rural schools, however, he stipulated this generalization does not hold true for rural communities where low-income, minority populations (such as First Nations reservations) are situated. This statement may explain why some research directly indicates the dropout rate is, in fact, higher in rural schools (De Young, 1994; Fellegi, 1996), especially for rural males (Fellegi, 1996).

A less-debated advantage of small rural schools deals with students with special needs. Mulcahy (1996) stated that there is an emergent body of research showing that small schools have a positive effect on "at risk" children. Kearney (1994) supported this point when he wrote: "Students in small schools are not allowed to fall through the cracks of the educational system. Teachers see to it that low achievers get the special attention they need" (p. 6). Teachers in small schools know their students, and their students' families, and, therefore, are better able to recognize special needs students.

Another positive attribute of rural schools is that there is less bureaucracy or administrative "red tape" in rural schools than there is in urban schools (Collins, 1999; Kearney, 1994; Nachtigal, 1982; Newton, 1993). Less bureaucracy means there is more cooperation and personal communication between administrators, teachers, and staff. In addition, because rural schools have a less complicated, more flexible structure, rural schools have a closer, more personal relationship with parents and the community at large.

Within rural schools, parents are more actively involved with the school (Howley & Eckman, 1997; Mulcahy, 1996; Stephens & Bhaerman, 1992). Rural parents are more likely than urban parents to have contact with their child's school, and rural parents are more likely to view school officials as approachable (Newton, 1993). In general, there is a closer, more positive school-home relationship in rural schools, partially the result of the high level of support that the community gives to its school. This positive, more closely-knit atmosphere (Ralph, 2003) is part of the reason why rural schools have a greater influence on the student's social values and affective domain (Baker & Gump, as cited in Kearney, 1994; Newton, 1993). Because of the general closeness felt within rural communities, rural schools tend to be warm and welcoming.

Rural Challenges

Rural schools have difficulty providing a range of curriculum options for their students (Government of Canada, 2001a; Howley & Eckman, 1997; MacKinnon, 1998; Ronan-Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2004; Sullivan, 2000). This point is especially pertinent for high school classes within the academic and fine arts fields (Newton, 1993). Although much research notes that curriculum specialties are often lacking within rural schools, there is another side to this argument. Monk (as cited in Kearney, 1994) claimed that a large school size does not guarantee advanced course offerings. Instead, Monk postulated the size of the school is related to the number of introductory courses offered. Through his research, Monk found that only a small percentage of students in larger high schools actually take advantage of courses that aren't available in small schools. Pittman and Haughwout (1987) agreed that larger schools do not necessarily mean better offerings, and they state, "On the average,

100 percent increase in enrollment yields only a 17 percent increase in the variety of offerings” (p. 337).

In general, the issue of resources, or lack of them, is frequently addressed as a concern of rural schools. Since rural schools often have limited resources, teachers must “make do” with what is available (Nachtigal, 1992). For example, rural schools are often in need of textbooks, up-to-date computer programs and IT services, and support services (Government of Canada, 2001a) such as guidance and counseling programs. In addition, the rural counseling and guidance programs provided may be unduly influenced by the values of the community (Newton, 1993) and, therefore, limited in focus.

The recruitment and retention of teachers is an issue within many rural communities (Collins, 1999; Balen, 1995; Howley & Pendarvis, 2003; Storey, 1993). A survey of teacher mobility was conducted with 94 past and current teachers in rural British Columbia. The survey highlighted the fact that teachers leave communities because of geographic isolation, weather, distance from larger communities and family, and inadequate shopping (Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). This survey also revealed that those teachers who do stay in rural communities stay because of effective administration, spousal employment in the community, and satisfaction with a rural lifestyle.

Cross and Frankcombe (1994) stated the rural lifestyle is difficult to cope with for young beginning teachers. A reason why new teachers experience hardships is the fact that most of them have few peers with whom they can interact. In addition, once employed by rural schools, any teacher, whether newly hired or experienced, is subject to high expectations from within the community (Balen, 1995). Ralph (2000) found that a

cohort of Saskatchewan interns rated the number one disadvantage of teaching in a rural school as “invasion of privacy” (p. 80). The students, the staff, and the community openly talked about the interns (the new members to their community) and some interns viewed this as an intrusion into their private lives.

Howley and Howley (2005) believed that an understanding and commitment to the cultural meaning that pervades life in rural places is highly relevant to the experience a teacher will professionally and personally encounter in a rural community. Such cultural meanings include attachment to place, strong commitment to the community’s well-being, connection to the outdoors, and concern for the stability of community (Theobald, 1997). Teacher education programs and professional development places little emphasis on understanding the “cultural” demands of teaching and its lifestyle (Theobald & Howley, 1998), and being unfamiliar with a community’s customs and beliefs may cause problems for teachers entering a new community, whether rural or urban. In fact, often rural communities hire teachers who are not from the catchment area. Corbett (as cited in Government of Canada, 2001a) stated that urban or “outside-of-the-community” teachers tend to devalue local employment and encourage students with apparent academic potential to leave the community for higher education. This advice is given particularly to rural female students. Such encouragement supports an out-migration of youth, which has repercussions for the viability of that community.

Educators tend to experience professional isolation in rural schools because teaching specialists do not enjoy the critical mass of colleagues as seen in larger school (Erlandson, 1994). For example, one high school teacher may be *the* Math Department and *the* Physical Education Department for the rural school. In such cases, fostering

professional development learning communities may need to include the networking of faculty from several school districts. Or, as Sherer, Shea, and Kristensen (2003) suggested, a promising approach to dealing with the professional isolation of rural educators involves the establishment of virtual learning communities. Such learning communities may be one way of fostering collegial dialog among subject specialties within rural areas.

Many rural teachers find that they must teach subjects out of their areas of specialization (Balen, 1995; Howley & Eckman, 1997; Nachitgal, 1992; Wilson, 1996). In addition, low enrolment in many rural schools means multi-grade classrooms are common (Balen, 1995; Newton, 1993; Wilson, 1996). Because rural schools generally have fewer specialized teachers, rural teachers must prepare and teach a greater variety of courses. The “ideal” rural teacher is specialized in numerous subject areas, can teach a wide level and age of students, is prepared to spend long hours supervising extra curricular activities, and can adjust or fit into the culture of the community. Because of these demands, teachers in rural schools tend to be less experienced, less well-trained, and have higher turnover rates than those in urban schools (De Young, 1994; Nachitgal, 1982).

Just like teachers, administrators often have an extensive list of responsibilities. For the most part, lack of administrative assistance in rural schools makes it necessary for principals to become involved in administrative details (Newton, 1993). Not only do administrators have full-time administrative duties, they often have a large teaching load, too (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2004; Wilson, 1996).

After completing grade 12, rural students who want to continue with postsecondary education are commonly forced to migrate to urban communities (Looker & Andres, 2001). Dupuy et al. (2000) reported that of those youths who migrate from their rural community, 12.4 percent seek a university degree, while only 5 percent who stay in their rural community seek a similar degree. Such numbers indicate there is usually a need to move away from rural communities if postsecondary education is desired. Moving away from the home community is a disadvantage to rural students, because these rural students often experience culture shock (Newton, 1993). Urban culture shock is stressful and may have a great influence on the student's academic success.

There are additional problems associated with rural schools. One of these problems is the transportation of its students. Bashutski, from the Saskatchewan Board of Trustees, (as cited in Marud, 1991) stated that studies indicate long bus rides are detrimental to a child's health and learning abilities, especially for small children. Not only are long bus rides to and from school a health issue, but traveling is a financial concern. This financial burden is also a reality when planning school activities such as field trips and extra-curricular events (Balen, 1995). Another financial disadvantage for rural schools is instructional costs. Compared to urban schools, rural schools have a higher instructional cost per student (De Young, 1994; Ronan-Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2004; Sullivan, 2000) because rural schools consume more resources per student. For example, schools with 100 students have almost the same support costs as those with 500 students (Warick, 2006), because both

schools require such things as a gymnasium, computer resources, a library, and athletic equipment.

Not only does it cost more to educate rural students, rural community members are greatly responsible for educational funding. Within Canada, education is financed through provincial grants and local funding. Specifically, within Saskatchewan, local revenue accounts for about 60 percent of the total educational revenue in each school district (Boughen, 2003). This local revenue is generated through each school district's community's property/business assessment via property tax. Saskatchewan's property taxes are the highest in Canada (Boughen, 2003). The Saskatchewan government is trying to deal with this issue. Recently, Saskatchewan's premier, Lorne Calvert, announced the provincial government will take on a greater share of the educational tax (Kirkland, 2006; Warrick, 2006). However, a primarily rural agricultural community still has a higher individual tax burden than a diversified community because of the lower population density. Therefore, not only does it cost more to educate rural students, the local communities take on most of the responsibility for educational services. Within rural Saskatchewan, declining enrollments, a decreasing taxpayer base, and lower farm incomes have increased the severity of the problem. Naturally, poor school districts have difficulty generating extra tax moneys, leading to potential inequalities in rural education (De Young, 1994).

The rural school plays an absolutely vital role in rural community development and sustenance (Hathaway, 1993). "The local school system is one of the largest employers in a small community; it may even be one of the largest landholders in a small town" (Howley & Eckman, 1997, p. 4). Figuratively, the rural school represents a

community's largest investment because it serves the needs of the people, not just the students (Nachitgal, 1992). Rural schools often serve the community in the form of medical centers, dental centers, meeting squares, concert halls, and recreational areas. Warick (2006) stated: "Many [rural communities] lost the hospital and grain elevator years ago. With the farm economy in almost constant crisis, these once-thriving communities are now trying desperately to hang on to their post office, grocery store, bank or school" (p. E1). Losing an institution such as the rural school is often a death sentence for the community. There is a special relationship that exists between the school and community in rural areas (Mulcahy, 1996; Wilson, 1996; Zolkavich, as cited in Robinson, 1996), and this very bond is under serious threat.

Rural Aspirations

The type of community with which urban or rural students are surrounded has a direct effect on the lives and aspirations of students. Markus and Nurius (1986) described aspirations as a reflection of what an individual would like to become, what he/she might become, and what he/she does not wish to become. Aspirations of adolescents are important antecedents for transition into adult roles in life (Blustein, 1997). In fact, "aspirations have been identified as one of the most significant determinants of eventual educational attainment" (Gottfredson, 1981, p. 545). As compared to urban students, rural students have lower educational aspirations and lower levels of educational attainment (Burnell, 2003; Government of Canada, 2001a; Harmon, 1999; Looker & Andres, 2001; O'Neill, 1981). In a study conducted by Statistics Canada, Cartwright and Allen (2002) stated, "In all provinces, urban students had significantly higher career aspirations than rural students" (p. 15). The subsequent

question that arises from this information is, “Why do rural students seem to aspire to less?”

A major influence affecting aspirations is career exposure. “Conditions in the community interact with the imaginations of students as they realize their aspirations” (Haas, 1992, para. 1). Rural and urban communities differ in potential employment opportunities (Cartwright & Allen, 2002) and the lack of active and diverse employment environments within rural communities. Studies show that the occupations most common within rural communities are of lower status and are characterized by lower wages and less benefits (Burnell, 2003; Harmon, 1999; Ronan-Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Simply stated, an individual growing up in a rural community is surrounded by an environment consisting of a limited number of job opportunities, most of which are lower-status.

What are some examples of these low-status jobs? To begin with, agriculture and fishing and trapping are vocations requiring less postsecondary education. Within Saskatchewan in 1996, 19.5 percent of its rural population aged 15-29 was directly employed within the agriculture, fishing, and trapping industries. This compares to 2.0 percent of urban individuals who were employed in these industries. Conversely, business is traditionally an area that has required postsecondary education. Within Saskatchewan in 1996, 3.8 percent of its rural population aged 15-29 was directly employed within business services while 8.8 percent of urban individuals were employed within this field (Dupuy et al., 2000). Many rural students simply do not see formal education as relevant to their future career success. Cartwright and Allen (2002) paraphrased this point when they stated, “Every child will likely do better in an urban

community because of the nature of the urban labor market and the overall higher levels of education among adults” (p. 6).

Another factor affecting the aspirations and career choices of a student is his/her parents’ education. There is much evidence revealing that parents have more influence on the plans and aspirations of young people than either teachers or school counselors (Beatson, 2000; Looker, as cited in Government of Canada, 2001b; Looker & Lowe, 2001; Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995). As well, higher levels of parent education are linked with advantages towards the child’s educational future (Bourdieu, as cited in Looker & Andres, 2001; DeBruin-Parecki, Paris, & Siedenburger, 1997; Philliber, Spillman, & King, 1996). According to Cartwright and Allen (2002), in all provinces except Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, the parents of urban students had *significantly* higher levels of educational attainment when compared to rural students. Mulcahy (1996) reported that in Newfoundland, educational levels of the rural adult population are *significantly* lower than the national average. Blackwell and McLaughlin (1999) examined the effects of parental background on youth aspirations and found that parental background does have an effect on youth, particularly for young rural women.

Urban Education

Because the vast majority of Canadian schools are urban, urban education is defined by default. That is, describing urban education is, in many ways, similar to defining “education in Canada”. Raynor and Barnes (1978) described urban education as, “a loose collection of disparate topics gathered under one heading, lacking in definition and therefore susceptible to whim, current concern or the crisis of the moment” (p. 3). Unlike rural education, there is little information which focuses on specific

characteristics of urban education, other than such extreme examples such as inner city schools and gangs in school. One way to approach an explanation of urban education is to compare it to rural education and to describe some of the extreme examples associated within urban education.

Urban Education as Compared to Rural Education

When comparing rural schools to urban schools, commonalities do arise. For example, just like rural schools, urban schools are a central part of a thriving community, and Donnelly (2003) stated that healthy school-community relationships are of paramount importance in urban areas. This is exemplified within the construction of the three new high schools being built in Saskatoon. Centennial Collegiate is scheduled to open in the August 2006 (Saccone, 2006), and Bethlehem Catholic High School and Tommy Douglas Collegiate are slated to open in the fall of 2007 (Gopal, 2006). Centennial Collegiate will become part of Saskatoon's "Forest Park Complex". This complex will be part school, part community center, and part indoor soccer pitch (Coolican, 2006). Bethlehem Catholic High School and Tommy Douglas Collegiate will be connected by a corridor and will share a 50 meter competitive and leisure swimming pool. These pools will be open to the public. Urban schools, such as these illustrated above are educational, physical, and spiritual focal points of the surrounding communities (Gopal, 2006).

As exemplified by these above schools, the first obvious difference between rural and urban is numbers. Urban schools operate in communities with higher population densities. This, in turn, means urban schools are normally bigger or have larger enrollments than do rural schools. High student enrollment means students are more

likely to be ignored or overlooked simply because of numbers (Kincheloe, 2004). In addition, although rural students are more likely than urban students to come from families with lower socio-economic backgrounds (Cartwright & Allen, 2002), because of a larger school population, urban schools are more likely to work with more students of low socioeconomic class. Therefore, urban schools have larger number of students who need assistance directly because of their socioeconomic status.

Another stark difference between rural and urban schools is that urban schools have more ethnic and religious diversity (Foote, 2005; Kincheloe, 2004). During the past 15 years, Canada has settled 3.3 million immigrants, 10 percent of its total population (Duffy, 2004). These immigrants come from more than 100 countries, most of which are non-English speaking (Birgandian, as cited by Strum & Biette, 2005). Of these newcomers to Canada, 60 percent come from Asia and the Middle East, and they make up to 20 to 60 percent of the student population in large cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary (Dawson, 1998; Duffy, 2004). Toronto is now one of the most multicultural cities in the world (*Human Settlement Country Profile: Canada, 2003*). Most urban centers throughout Canada deal with ethnic diversity at some level. For example, for the 2005-2006 school year, St. Mary's School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan enrolled 57 refugee or immigrant students from more than 16 countries, and most of these students entered the school knowing little English (Pavlin, 2006). Since urban schools serve higher immigrant populations than rural schools, there is greater need for linguistic and curriculum diversity within these schools. For instance, the inclusion of English as Second Language (ESL) is of paramount importance within many urban public schools.

A study done by Watt and Roessingh (2001) described the dropout rates of ESL Canadian youths, the vast majority of whom are urban dwellers. The findings of their research indicated that ESL students remain disadvantaged in Canadian schools, and the overall dropout rate among ESL students in Canada is 74 percent (Watt & Roessingh, 2001), a rate two-and-a-half times greater than that of the Canadian general student population (Duffy, 2004). This statement contributes to the discussion of rural and urban dropout rates. Generalizations reflecting rural and urban dropout rates are difficult to make, because the dropout rate of a specific urban or rural school is dependent upon who is in that community and the economics that support the community. Nevertheless, for the immigrant population, who are predominantly in urban areas, providing a quality education is an issue that needs to be dealt with more seriously than it is at present.

Classroom management in urban schools is more challenging than in rural schools (Brown, 2003; Cotton, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). An American study revealed that 50 percent of urban teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their careers, citing behaviour problems and management as factors influencing their decision (National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, 2002). Weiner (2003) agreed that "classroom management is especially problematic for urban teachers" (p. 305). Burnett (1994) noted that urban youth present higher rates of disruptive behaviour in class. Urban students often view themselves as victims and exhibit learned helpless behaviours (Reed & Davis, as cited in Foote, 2005).

Inner City Schools

There are literally thousands of urban schools in Canada, but inner city schools have the reputation of being the most challenging. Students from inner city schools often

“come from very difficult backgrounds and often have multiple psychological and emotional problems” (Donnelly, 2003, p. 4). In addition, teachers are faced with a plethora of challenges in these schools, ranging from poverty, violence, and cultural and linguistic diversity (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996; Ginsberg, Poliner-Shapiro, & Brown, 2004). Within inner city schools there are often many serious social problems such as drugs, alcohol, and dysfunctional families. These schools often have a high population of students whose first language is not English and a high turn over rate of students (Erskine-Cullen & Sinclair, 1996). These same schools experience higher teacher turnover because such schools often offer less well-maintained schools, a lower-achieving student body, and more demanding working conditions (Kincheloe, 2004). By the time teachers have gained success in teaching in such difficult conditions, they use their seniority and experience to move to less demanding cultural situations in middle class areas (Arthur & Erickson, 1992).

“A significant and ever-growing body of research on urban education underscores that students in these schools [inner city schools] often reject or drop out of school because they do not see their culture’s contributions and experiences reflected in the curriculum” (Ginsberg et al., 2004, p. xix). Teachers have low expectations of students and fail to involve them in pertinent learning experiences and environments. Because definitions of educational success are often based on test scores, other forms of creativity, contribution, and intelligence are ignored. Many of these students don’t want to assimilate into a society that basically treats them like second-class citizens (Ginsberg et al., 2004). One result of this is that, “Gangs are penetrating more of our schools” (Arthur & Erickson, 1992, p. ii) because they provide a sense of identity, opportunity, excitement

and a measure of protection and security. Within Saskatchewan, there are roughly 1,500 “known” gang members or associates, and gang activities are now well established in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and some rural locales (Bernhardt, 2006).

Success Rates of Rural and Urban Students

The question remains, “Who enjoys a better quality of education: rural or urban students?” The answer to this question includes conflicting views. Scharf (as cited in Wotherspoon, 1998) reported that there are no significant differences between Saskatchewan rural and urban students in regards to educational attainment and achievement. An American study conducted by the Vermont Department of Education (as cited in Sullivan, 2000) found that students in rural schools do as well or better than those in larger schools. In addition, the negative effect of having a disadvantaged background is significantly less in small rural schools than in medium to large schools (Huang & Howley, 1993). In fact, Sizer (as cited in Howley & Eckman, 1997) is convinced that rural and small schools foster better teaching and learning. In an American study conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress (as cited by Kearny, 1994), the mathematics, writing, reading, and science scores for rural students were equivalent to the national mean.

However, there is evidence suggesting rural students do not do as well as their urban counterparts. De Young (1994) stated achievement scores for rural students are slightly below those in urban areas. According to the international study, Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), students from urban schools significantly outperformed students from rural schools in reading (Cartwright & Allen, 2002).

Chesterman (as cited in Arnold, 1995) summed it up when he said that research on school size and effectiveness is ambiguous and inconclusive. It is clear, however, that Canadian citizens during each of the four census periods of 1981, 1986, 1991, and 1996 show persistent gaps between urban and rural post-secondary educational attainment, with the greatest share of lower level education found within rural Canada.

How do success rates compare for those rural and urban students who do attend postsecondary institutions? The answer to this again is two-sided. Some research studies indicate that when enrolled in postsecondary institutions, rural youths are more likely than urban students to drop out (McCracken & Barcinas, as cited in Burnell, 2003; De Young, 1994). Ronan-Herzog and Pittman (1995) stated there are mixed findings about the successes of rural students beyond high school, but in general, rural students do not do as well in postsecondary completion. Nachtigal (1992), on the other hand, stated that students from the very smallest schools remain in college and are as likely to graduate from colleges as those from the largest high schools. Rance (2006) stated that research shows students from small schools are more apt to complete postsecondary education than students from large schools.

Summary

This literature review described how a teacher's background affects his or her classroom instruction, and why it is important for the teacher to understand the culture of the community in which he or she teaches. Strong school-community relations support and strengthen the educative process. Teaching is a highly demanding profession, and the roles and responsibilities of a teacher are diverse. This literature review also described rural and urban education. It gave reasons why many rural schools are closing,

and it presented the strengths and challenges of rural education. Urban education is characterized by larger schools. The repercussions of larger enrollments are greater student diversity and more curriculum options. What this chapter lacks is information which unites the three topics of “teaching experience”, “rural schools” and “urban schools”. As of yet, there is little research which compares the different experiences of rural and urban teachers, which is the focus of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD OF RESEARCH

In this chapter I discuss the research methodology used to conduct this study. The qualitative paradigm is described and reasons for specifically choosing this research paradigm are given. The steps which were followed to conduct the research are then outlined. Finally, ethical considerations are identified and explained.

Qualitative Research

Eisner (1981) metaphorically describes the “richness” of qualitative research when he said: “To know a rose by its Latin name and yet to miss its fragrance is to miss much of the rose’s meaning” (p. 9). My research began by listening to personal stories, continued with an analysis of meaning, and ended by presenting conclusions based on the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) said qualitative researchers “study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). My study is well-suited for a qualitative method of research because I describe the perspectives and experiences that educators have regarding rural and urban education. In short, this thesis focuses on exploring the nature of rural and urban teaching experiences; it is about exploring social encounters.

For Dewey (1938), an experience is both a personal and social thing, indicating that each person’s life experiences are unique. In addition, his or her experiences cannot be understood only as an individual, because experiences are dependent upon social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described how

personal and social aspects are omnipresent within an experience. They use the example of how a child learns. A child's "learning experience" is based on the antics and behaviours of that individual child, but the experience is also determined by the interaction which takes place with other children, with parents, with teachers, within the classroom, and within the community.

Another criterion of experience is continuity. To understand a given situation, an explanation of prior experiences is usually necessary. Butt, Raymond, McCue, and Yamagishi (1992) believed studying a teacher's life experiences means studying a relationship between past, present, and future. They continued by explaining that every experience has a history (the past), is in the process of changing (the present), and is potentially going somewhere (the future). Therefore, studying an experience means including knowledge as it has been, as it is being, and as it will be. "Experiences grow out of experiences and experiences lead to further experiences" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). As a result, when researchers are studying "an experience" they need to look at the continuity and wholeness of that scenario (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1939).

Since experiences happen narratively (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), one method of accessing the wholeness of an experience is through a story. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) continued by saying, "Education and educational studies are a form of experience. For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience" (p. 18). Narratives are ways of bringing meaningfulness to everyday life. Goodson (2003) believed narratives are well-suited for specific research which pursues an understanding of the life and work of a teacher. Ritchie & Wilson (2000) argued that within teacher

education, this narrative process promotes reflection, reinterpretation, and revision. This is important because, as Dewey (1938) believed, an experience is invaluable unless we can reflect upon it and recognize what is valuable in it.

This qualitative thesis utilizes components of narrative inquiry to answer the research question: **What are the experiences and perspectives of teachers with respect to teaching in both rural and urban environments?** Because the answer to this question is naturally suited as a story-telling event, qualitative research, (and more specifically, aspects of narrative inquiry) are appropriate for my study. For example, through interviews, I investigate attitudes of seven teachers by simply asking them to tell me about their life and teaching experiences. As well, I include my own perspectives, my own life experiences, and my personal anecdotes into this thesis. Together, these stories are “carriers of a dominant message” (Goodson, 2003, p. 41); they are the answer to my research question.

The Researcher as a Participant

As a researcher, I need to consider my own perspective as well as the perspectives of others (Geertz, 1983). Like the participants of this study, I too have taught in both rural and urban schools, and I recognize some of the strengths and challenges associated with each setting. An important aspect of this study was the fact that my experiences were an interactive component of the research. That is, my personal teaching experiences are also valued and therefore were incorporated as part of the data.

Conducting the Research

The following information describes how I selected my participants, designed the interview format, developed questions, did the pilot tests of the interview process, conducted the interviews, and analyzed the interview data.

Selecting Participants

The seven participants for this study were chosen using “purposive sampling”. With this type of sampling, “researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2002, p. 194). That is, the selection of participants for this study was “hand-picked”. Since this research will not be generalized over a large population, random sampling was neither necessary nor appropriate.

Purposive sampling allowed me to choose participants who filled a variety of requirements. The first requirement was that the participants be teachers who had experienced teaching in both rural and urban settings. Next, although each individual teacher did not need to have kindergarten to grade 12 teaching experience, as a whole, the sample of teachers needed to include a range of kindergarten to grade 12 teaching experience. The selected group needed to represent a range of grade levels and specializations. Both sexes needed to be represented, and I wanted a variety of ages and years of teaching experience. Another requirement of the participants was that they expressed interest in the study.

I selected the participants by first approaching individuals I knew from my previous experience in teaching. Second, I sought participants by utilizing contacts in the educational field. For example, I talked about my research to my colleagues and professors and asked them if they knew of anyone who met my requirements. Third,

after identifying a number of individuals through the above means, I conducted a brief discussion with each to verify their interest and willingness to participate in my research. From those who met the initial requirements, a selection was made. These participants were contacted again and given a letter of invitation (see Appendix A). This letter was used as one of my initial contacts with my participants, and it explained, in general, the purpose and various aspects of my research.

Designing the Interview Format

The purpose of the research determines the nature of the interview (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Because I wanted to probe for answers and explore in depth the rural and urban experiences of teachers, the interview format was semi-structured. I asked a series of open-ended questions and, in an effort to obtain additional information, I often asked additional questions relating specifically to the participants' answers. This semi-structured interview reflected a conversation. Having the freedom to ask points of verification or "sub-questions" of the participants' answers allowed me to gain a greater depth of understanding. In addition, these semi-structured interviews helped the participants express their views of a phenomenon in their own terms (Gall et al., 2003). Each interview contained some form of humour or laughter. Because the questions were conducive to conversation, the tone was more relaxed and personable.

Many of my questions required story-like answers. For example, some of my first questions were, "Tell me about yourself and where you grew up?" and "Why did you decide to become a teacher?" For these questions, all of the participants answered with stories descriptive of personal life experiences. As Dewey suggested, the ultimate aim of any type of research is to study human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and it is

through the medium of a story or the discussion of an experience that a deeper understanding of others and of ourselves is gained (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Through these semi-structured interviews, each participant's lived experiences were my data.

For reasons of comfort, I ensured the place and time of the interview was a choice of the participants. For several interviews, I drove out of town and conducted interviews in the participant's home and/or office. Witherell and Noddings (1991) believed that a comfortable setting is important in creating a trusting relationship between the interviewer and the participant. Glesne (1999) identified the importance of this trust by stating, "Trust is the foundation for facilitating full and detailed answers to your questions" (p. 83).

Because of the geographical locations of three of my participants, I utilized the telephone as an interview medium. As Gall et al. (2003) stated, telephone interviews allow for the selection of a broader accessible population with less financial restraints. For these participants, pre-interview contacts and interviews were conducted over the phone. I found the length of telephone interviews to be shorter than face-to-face interviews. However, I found both the telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews comparably rich with information.

Developing Questions

Each participant was involved in two semi-structured interviews, and each interview lasted about one hour. The purpose of the first interview was to provide an opportunity to talk about the participant's personal background and specifics of his or her rural and urban teaching experiences and perspectives. Specific topics of discussion for

the first interview included: personal background, a description of the schools in which the participants taught, instructional methods they used, and resources available within their schools (See Appendix B). The second interview was, in fact, a continuation of the first interview. After a quick reiteration of what had been covered in the first interview, the second interview allowed the participants to talk about various other aspects of their rural and urban teaching experiences. This interview began by asking the participant to describe a typical day in one of his/her schools. The interview continued by addressing such discussion topics as professional development, first-year of teaching, preparing high school students for the future, the most enjoyable and frustrating aspects of teaching, recognizable differences between rural and urban education, and advice that he/she would give to neophyte rural and urban teachers (see Appendix C).

Conducting Pilot Interviews

There were numerous reasons why I needed to conduct pilot interviews. First, the interviews assisted in determining the overall effectiveness and quality of the interview questions. The pilot interviews helped me verify the length of time needed for each interview. These practice interviews also assisted in identifying logistical problems which might occur, such as unfamiliarity with the technical aspects of recording and physical seating arrangements.

I conducted three pilot interviews. During my first pilot interview, I used my digital recorder for the first time. The interview allowed me an opportunity to practice with the new recorder, download an interview on my computer, and practice transcribing. I gained confidence as an interviewer. I was pleased that my pilot participant seemed to

understand my questions and did not ask for clarification. As well, the length of this interview was appropriate. It was one hour and ten minutes.

The next pilot interview (my second set of questions) allowed for another opportunity to practice. Again, I used my digital recorder, I downloaded the interview on my computer, and I practiced transcribing. From this interview, I discovered the eight questions I had prepared were answered in a short amount of time, as this interview lasted only about 30 minutes. After reflecting upon the purpose of my study, I created three additional questions and added them to my second set of interview questions. The participant and I met for a third time to “try them out”. Together, the second and third pilot interviews lasted about 50 minutes. I was pleased with the quality of these extra questions, because I felt that I covered additional topics that were pertinent for my study. For subsequent interviewees, all eleven questions were asked in the second interview.

Conducting the Interview

The interviews were structured from the pre-formulated interview questions. The interviews took the form of a relaxed, semi-structured conversation. The time and location were of the participant’s choosing. Both interviews were recorded using a digital tape recorder.

I conducted telephone interviews by utilizing a phone speaker within my home. The tape recorder was placed next to the phone speaker to tape the telephone conversation. For reasons of anonymity, I ensured that during these telephone conversations, no one, besides me, was present within the room I was conducting the telephone interview.

Analyzing the Interview Data

Data were analyzed once interviews and transcriptions were completed. I began my analysis by reading each interview transcript in its entirety. This action allowed me to obtain an initial impression and comprehensive sense of the information (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Thereafter, each participant's data were reread, but more systematically. From the data, I created a preliminary list of key ideas and phrases, which were grouped into broad categories. The identification of these details involved my intuition (Cole & Knowles, 2000) and subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988). During this initial summary process, the ten broad categories focused upon the experiences of teacher within the following areas: "school", "community", "students", "parents", "instruction", "administration", "resources", "extracurricular activities and supervisory duties", "professional development", and "teaching advice". As I read and reread the information collected within these categories, I focused on how these data pertained to my research question which involved describing how teachers perceive rural and urban teaching experiences. I looked at each category and further divided the data into "rural" and "urban" information. It was at this point that I wanted to unite this array of information. I recognized that my category titles were really subgroups of two major themes. Thus, ten broad categories merged into two themes: "community and school" and "teaching responsibilities". To answer my research question, these themes were represented from a rural and urban perspective. (It is important to note that all participants had the dual experience of having worked within both rural and urban schools.) At this point, all interviews were reread again ensuring that the data representing each group and theme was accurate.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting this research, the following issues were considered:

Voluntary Participation

When conducting research, it is important to recognize that participants are vulnerable. Because of participant vulnerability, I assured them that their participation was voluntary and a withdrawal from the study was possible at any time. These points were explained through a written consent letter (see Appendix D).

Issue of Consent

A written consent letter was read to the participants. Any aspects of the letter that were unclear were further clarified orally. This letter outlined the purpose of the research and the manner in which it was conducted. This letter was signed by the participant. His/her signature indicated his/her consent to participate in the research.

Release of Transcripts Agreement

After transcribing the interviews, the participants were provided with the a copy of the transcript and were provided the opportunity to add, alter, and delete any information from the transcripts as they saw appropriate. This allowed participants to check for accuracy, and it allowed the participants to make sure the transcripts reflected their intended meanings. Some participants added a few minor changes. Some participants were satisfied with the transcripts in their original form. To acknowledge that the transcripts accurately reflected what was said in the interview and to authorize the release of the transcripts to me, the participants signed a Transcript Release Form (see Appendix E).

Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality was ensured as far as possible for all participants. Pseudonyms were given to the names of the teachers. The schools to which they referred were identified as the “rural” or “urban” school. As well, specific details which could enable a reader to deduce the participants’ identities were made more generic.

Access to Information and Storage of Data

At all times, only my research supervisor and I had access to the research data/information. All data will be stored in a locked container at the University of Saskatchewan for five years after completion of the study.

Ethics Approval

This research was reviewed and approved by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan on February 24, 2006 (see Appendix F).

CHAPTER 4

THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES

The purpose of this study was to describe, through a series of semi-structured interviews, the differences between rural and urban education as experienced by teachers who had taught in both rural and urban schools. Within this chapter, a short profile of each participant is included. Next, two short stories (based on the aggregated experiences of participants) personifying typical rural and urban teaching days are composed. Also included is a discussion of the data, followed by a discussion of the data in light of related literature. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Selection of Participants

To obtain participants who were well-suited for my research, first I contacted friends and relatives. Then I contacted previous colleagues. Additionally, I made contact with teachers who had formerly taught me. Next, my circle of university friends and classmates served as potential participants. Even though many of these initial contacts did not meet the primary requirement of having taught in both rural and urban schools, I was happily surprised that a “snowball effect” occurred. That is, a number of the initial people I spoke to talked to people they knew, who spoke to people they knew. As a result, I collected a list of 16 potential participants. During an informal conversation with these potential volunteers, I was able to run each person’s profile through the study’s participant requirements. Each candidate needed to have taught in rural and urban (as defined by Statistic Canada) schools. The selected group needed to represent a range of

grade level and specializations. Both sexes needed to be represented, and I wanted a variety of ages and years of teaching experience. A final requirement of the participants was that they needed to express interest in the study.

Using the above guidelines, I refined the final number of participants to seven. Five participants were female and two were male. The teachers ranged roughly in age from 25 to 60 years, and they had from five to 25 years teaching experience. Five of the participants were classroom teachers, one participant was specialized as a resource room teacher, and one participant had been an administrator for most of his educational career. The selected group had a diverse range of teaching interests and represented specialties in the following areas: Language Arts, Math, Science, Fine Arts, Theatre, Drama, French, and Special Needs. All of the participants had worked in Saskatchewan or Alberta in the public school system and all had taught in both urban and rural schools. The data for this study only included their experiences within rural and urban schools within Saskatchewan or Alberta.

Through two semi-structured interviews, the participants shared their intimate educational stories with me. Through the medium of an interview, I was able to obtain an overview of the different stages of their teaching journeys. Towards the end of the second interview, as an interview summary, the participants were asked to identify any recognizable differences between rural and urban students.

Description of Each Participant

To set the scene for the reader, a short abstract of each participant biography will be given. In order to protect teacher anonymity, this profile will be brief. Each

participant has been given a pseudonym. Their years of experience have been approximated, and names of towns and schools are not used.

Elaine

Elaine grew up in a small rural community with a population of a little over 1,000. As a child and teenager, Elaine lived on the farm and helped with the chores typically associated with raising livestock and growing crops. Being the oldest of five children, she also had the extra responsibility of assisting with the raising of her siblings.

Elaine's mother was a teacher, and it was just expected that Elaine would go to university, especially since she had a love for books and reading. At the time of the study, Elaine had about 15 years of teaching experience, all of which were at the early elementary level of education. She had a keen interest in early childhood education and strove to make her teaching as pertinent and hands-on as possible for her students. Elaine taught longer in the urban system than in the rural system.

Jenny

Jenny grew up in the city. As a teenager, she was always active in school activities and was enrolled in an advanced educational program from grade 9 to grade 12. This extremely rigorous program was well-suited for Jenny, as she is gifted with strong cognitive and verbal abilities. Throughout high school and university, she was an active member on national and international debate teams.

During the time of this study, Jenny had taught for about 10 years and had similar amounts of teaching experience in both rural and urban environments. She taught predominantly middle years and high school. She had a keen interest in English and the

Fine Arts. Her story illustrated how she was an extremely active member within her school community.

Hannah

Hannah grew up and received her kindergarten to grade 12 education in a rural community. She described this community as being very close-knit; a place where everyone knew what everyone else was doing. This community relied quite heavily upon the oil and agricultural industries for employment and financial security. Her community's prosperity reflected the health of each industry.

As a child, Hannah only ever wanted to be a teacher. She always loved children, and she wanted to leave a humanitarian mark on society; hence her calling into education. At the time of this study, Hannah had taught for about 10 years. She spent most of her teaching years in the rural elementary school system.

Paula

Paula was born and raised in a small agricultural Saskatchewan community. She described herself as a "town kid" as opposed to a "country kid" because she lived right in a bustling little agricultural town. She indicated that she felt safe growing up in this little town, and her supportive home community looked out for one another. Paula commented, "*You could go anywhere around town and your parents knew where you were.*"

Paula decided to become a teacher because she always loved children, and school was an environment which was identifiable and comfortable for her. Paula's initial employment was in a rural community where she taught for a few years. After that, she

spent about 10 years in urban schools, and during that time she was predominantly a resource teacher for children with special needs.

Heidi

Like most of the above participants, Heidi's background was based on a rural upbringing. Heidi was raised in a small Saskatchewan community and as a child walked to school. She described her school as one that consisted of the academics, but it also contained pertinent rural education like planting and harvesting.

Heidi said she was born a teacher. Even though she has now retired from teaching with 25-plus years of experience, she looked back on her teaching experiences and said, "*I would gladly do it all over again!*" When talking to Heidi, her enthusiasm and energy for her teaching was contagious. Heidi's teaching experience is diverse. Although the majority of her teaching was within middle school, she had taught all grades. She spent most of her teaching years employed within rural school divisions; however, she had also taught for many years in urban schools, as well.

Benjamin

Benjamin was raised within a middle-class family and had fond memories of his childhood. He grew up surrounded by lots of friends and an abundance of support from home. Both his parents were educators, and, at the time of the study, his sister was in education as well. Benjamin lived in the city most of his life while growing up and while going to university. His original interest at the start of his university was within natural science and, therefore, he enrolled in the College of Arts and Science. By the end of his university years, he acquired two degrees, those being a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education.

Before his formal teaching career began, Benjamin was a teacher assistant. At the time of this study, not including his teacher assistant experience, Benjamin's had approximately five years of classroom teaching, almost all of which consisted of teaching within a rural setting. He specialized in teaching middle years. Although he taught a range of subjects, he greatly enjoyed teaching science because of the potential to make this subject an interesting and hands-on experience for his students. Benjamin was another hard-working teacher who was always willing to go that extra mile for any student who needed it.

Joseph

Due to the transient nature of his father's employment, Joseph grew up in a number of small rural communities across Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Joseph's desire to become a teacher stemmed from three sources: an exceptional teacher role model he had in high school, his passion for the subject of mathematics, and the general respect and positive lifestyle enjoyed by teachers.

At the time of this study, Joseph had more than 20 years of teaching experience. With his comforting voice and articulate speech, it was easy to understand why he had such great success in education. Joseph taught in elementary, middle years, and high school classrooms; however, he specialized in middle school and high school mathematics. After seven years of full-time teaching, he spent the remainder of his school years either as a part-time or full-time administrator and/or classroom teacher. For the majority of that time, Joseph was involved in rural education.

A Typical Rural and Urban Teaching Day

I begin with two stories which depict a typical day in the life of a rural teacher and a typical day in the life of an urban teacher. The main source of information for these stories is taken from the narrative answers given in interview #2, question #1 (see Appendix C), and, in part, from my own experiences. For this question, the participants were asked to focus on one of the schools in which they taught, and describe a typical day. Four participants chose to talk about a rural teaching day, and three participants chose to talk about an urban teaching day.

The information presented in the following narratives reflects various aspects of rural and urban education. The stories are an aggregated teacher's-eye version of rural and urban education. Are the following narratives a true and accurate version of the data? "Since the experiences on which narratives are based may be vague and uncertain, the stories they arouse can never be determinate or complete" (Shotter, as cited by Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745). All stories "rearrange, redescribe, invent, omit, and revise" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745), at least to some extent. Then what is the reason for presenting these narratives? As Connelly and Clandinin (1997) explained narratives are a way of collecting, analyzing, and presenting information. In constructing narratives, we often selectively recall behaviours and events in order to make the telling of information more understandable (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). Thus, these two narratives are a form of analyzing and presenting the participants' data in an interesting and comprehensive format.

In some ways, the rural and urban stories are similar. However, in many other ways these stories differ because they highlight unique attributes of each setting. It is

important to stipulate that one story is not meant to be portrayed as any better or any worse than the other. The stories are merely set in different contexts and, thus, have their own distinctiveness. Assigning the labels “Mrs.” to the rural narrative and “Mr.” to the urban narrative have no significance to rural or urban education. It is merely a way of including both sexes in my story.

Mrs. Rural’s Teaching Day

The alarm clock rings. Mrs. Rural’s first thoughts are: “It’s Thursday, my supervision day. Oh right, I have choir practice after school, too. I better wear some comfortable shoes!” She had never intended to schedule choir practice on the same day as her supervision. She initially met with the students and attempted to schedule these extracurricular choir practices during lunchtime on the days she didn’t supervise, but too many of the students were involved in overlapping activities like yearbook, drama, intramural sports, and house meetings on those days. There were only a limited number of students in the school, many of whom just wanted to be in everything all the time. Thus, Mrs. Rural ended up with an extremely busy Thursday.

After psyching herself up for the day ahead, Mrs. Rural jumps out of bed excited about the task before her. She decides on wearing a cotton pantsuit and not a dress. The hectic pace of her day means she will not only need comfortable shoes, but comfortable attire, as well.

She and her family enjoy a quick toast-and-cereal breakfast. Mrs. Rural gets up to leave and as she exits through the front screen door, she hears the crunch of granola. The door bangs shut behind her. Hanging from her shoulders are her purse and school case. She also carries two heavy bags of resources. Yesterday right after school, she

had driven into the city for an optometrist appointment. After the appointment, she had just enough time to visit The Teacher Store and purchase the extra resources she wanted for her classroom. Armed with and enthusiastic about her newly-found heavy treasures, she decides to drive to school even though the walk is only five minutes.

Half way to the school, she hears a menacing “clonk” from the engine. She pulls over to the side of the road, and her car stops! She gets out of her car and kicks the tire. Wasn’t it just yesterday that her husband and she had said it was time they took their car to “Sam’s Auto-body & Repair” for a checkup? She had a feeling this was going to happen. Usually, she was so organized and over-prepared, but not today. She is frustrated with herself for not having followed her intuition.

Coincidentally, Sam, the community mechanic, is coming up the road in his tow truck en route to work. He stops and offers her a ride to school. As she gets into the tow truck, Sam greets Mrs. Rural with a friendly “Good morning,” and then proceeds to ask Mrs. Rural about Brennan, his son. Sam noticed that Brennan didn’t do well on his last spelling test. Mrs. Rural assures Sam that, in general, Brennan is doing fine. She adds that he is doing exceptionally well in mathematics, which seems to be his forte. Mrs. Rural changes the subject and comments that she is looking forward to seeing Wendy, Sam’s wife, after school. Wendy is the pianist for Mrs. Rural’s choir.

Sam drops Mrs. Rural off at the school at 8:15 and tells her that he will check her car later in the day. His morning is booked with the priority of fixing Mr. Smith’s combine. Mrs. Rural gives Sam her car keys. As Mrs. Rural enters the school, she waves to Mrs. Robinson who is on her way to open the local grocery store, Safe Mart.

After entering the school, Mrs. Rural goes straight to her classroom, takes out her day book, and glances at the day ahead. She reviews what she has already planned and makes sure she has all the needed materials. With only one prep period a week, she needs to do all her planning, correcting, and collection of materials after school and on weekends. There is no time during the school day for much other than teaching.

Today, her grade 7 teaching duties include Language Arts, French, Math, Science (a double), Fine Arts, Health, and Social Studies. All's a go for Language Arts. She's pleased with the progress the students are making on their character sketches. She knows the students' constructive work in this area is partially attributed to the fact that the class is using its community ranching background to write about Jack Schaefer's cowboy "Shane". Even Rob, who struggles with the academic work, can reflect on his ranching home life to assist him to write a paragraph about this protagonist. Last class she noticed David was having trouble with his assignment. She reminds herself that she must be extra patient with him. The recent separation of his mother and father has been very difficult for all the siblings in this family. Mrs. Rural knows David's siblings, Jackie and Marnie, who are also having difficulty dealing with the separation.

Mrs. Rural is extremely glad that she has a textbook for Math, as outdated as it is. Math is not her strong point, but she is confident enough to give the students what they need for grade 7 Math.

A double Science period takes up the rest of the morning. The class will be going on a community field trip and writing a lab based on the outing. They will walk to the nearby slough and investigate its aquatic microenvironment. Last week, she had phoned

Mr. and Mrs. Jones and asked permission to take her class to the slough which is situated on their land. Mrs. Jones assured her there was no problem with that.

The afternoons are always a little less academically intense. She has all the paper and charcoal needed for sketches in Fine Arts. These supplies are lying on the shelf. She questions whether she should lock them in her desk, just to be on the safe side. She decides the supplies should be fine where they are. She's got a good bunch of kids.

She sees Health slated as the next subject and hopes that Carla remembers that heart! The previous day they talked about the human circulatory system. Carla told Mrs. Rural that her dad had just recently butchered a steer, and her family saved the heart. Carla said she would bring it to school, and the class could have a show-and-tell demonstration of how the blood is pumped through the various chambers of the heart. Mrs. Rural knows that activity will grab the students' attention. If Carla forgets to bring the heart, Mrs. Rural decides she will give the class an extra period to work on their character sketches. Last week, they lost one of their Language Arts periods due to the school-wide talk on "bullying".

After a quick hand-wash, Mrs. Rural will change subjects again. In Social Studies, the class will take out their maps from last day and continue to find the longitude and latitude of various places throughout North American including Wyoming, the setting for the Language Arts novel, "Shane".

Mrs. Rural is confident about the day. Her only regret is that she won't have time this morning to display some of the resources she brought with her from the city. She'll have to do that after choir practice.

She walks to the staffroom at 8:27, and the hallways are already busy with the traffic of other teachers also on their way to the staffroom. As she passes a few classrooms, she sees “the Jenkins family”. Mike, Rhonda, and Chad are already at school. Although they are not supposed to be in school quite so early, she can trust them. They are good kids, and she knows they won’t get into trouble. She decides to ignore them.

It’s 8:30, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays at this time, everyone meets in the staffroom for an informal staff meeting. The meeting brings the staff up-to-date on the activities of the day and the principal gives a quick overview of upcoming events. Thank goodness it’s just a five-minute meeting because at 8:35, Mrs. Rural’s hallway supervision starts.

After the meeting, Mrs. Rural walks into the hallway. Mrs. Rural does enjoy this ad hoc time with the kids. She views this “meeting and greeting of students” as an informal chat session. The students enjoy talking with her, and they follow her around as she walks in and out of the classrooms. During this time, she hears what’s happening with various brothers, sisters, and cousins. She hears who won last night’s junior volleyball game against the neighboring town. She hears that Sherri Nolan just had her baby, and all is well with the family. Two students ask her what happened to her car. Such informal chatting will continue during her fifteen-minute morning recess supervision, her half-hour lunch supervision, and her fifteen-minute afternoon recess supervision.

The bell rings signaling the start of school. As she walks to her classroom she thinks, “It’s great to be able to be such an active player in this community’s school.”

Mr. Urban's Teaching Day

The alarm clock rings. Mr. Urban's first thoughts are: "After having stayed up until 12 midnight going through a great portion of 70 character sketches, I am a bit tired this morning." Nonetheless, he takes a big breath and jumps out of bed looking forward to the busy day ahead. One needs to be "with the program" as they say when teaching 100 students every day.

Since today is Thursday, Mr. Urban has after-school drama practice. Although it's a bit difficult at the end of the day to be an enthusiastic drama teacher, the theatre has always been an interest of his. Mr. Urban knows that when the time comes, his drama class will go well. Besides, facilitating this after-school activity is an informal and fun way for Mr. Urban to get to know more about the students he teaches. He was really surprised by the number of students who signed up for this class. With 32 students, the auditorium stage will be full.

After getting dressed, Mr. Urban heads to the kitchen and prepares a pot of coffee for his wife and himself. Mrs. Urban and their teenage son are still sleeping. He will wake them just before he leaves. His wife always drives their son to high school, which is half way across the city. Since their son's school is near Mrs. Urban's workplace, the arrangement works well.

Mr. Urban exits the house at 7:25 and walks a short distance to the bus stop. During this walk, he is always thankful for the convenient location of their house. It's only a two-minute walk to the bus stop and a ten-minute drive to all the major stores. On the bus to school, he remembers his evening plans. His wife and he are off to the Theatre. He is looking forward to the evening's production. As well, he reminds himself

that he must check whether the theatre performs any matinees. That would be a great field trip for her Fine Arts class.

Mr. Urban arrives at school around 7:45 every day. He knows the school will be open because the school principal always arrives at 7:30 and turns off the alarm system. When he first started working at this school, he found it frustrating that he didn't have a key and couldn't access or utilize the premises at his whim. However, he quickly learned the school's rules and regulations, got used to them, and organized his life around them.

Habitually, Mr. Urban arrives at the school early. This morning, the extra time involves correcting student assignments. He sits down at his desk and finishes the pile of character sketches. Then he pulls out his daybook and reviews what he has planned for the day.

Today's list includes six classes and one prep period: Language Arts 8 (his homeroom), Language Arts 8 (Mr. Rogers' homeroom), Fine Arts 7 (mixture of grade 7 students), Preparation Period, French 7 (Mrs. Green's homeroom), French 8 (his homeroom), and French 8 (Mr. Rogers' homeroom). Luckily, the Language Arts classes will more or less be a repeat. He will hand back the students' character sketches. Then all students will utilize the written comments they received from their peers earlier in the week and also make use of the comments he has just written. With these suggestions, they will reflect, revise, and improve their piece of literature preparing it for its final draft. He is thankful that he chose a different novel for each class, thus adding a bit of variety in terms of classroom discussion topics and material presentation.

Fine Arts 7 is always a fun and active time. At present, the class is concentrating on a drama unit. The Grade 7 Language Arts teacher and Mr. Urban have preparation

periods at the same time this semester. They took some of this time to collaborate and integrate their subjects. In Language Arts, the students wrote plays. In Mr. Urban's Fine Art's class, the students will take their plays and practice performing them. Later in the month, the students are scheduled to perform their plays during school time. Mr. Urban is very proud of the class' efforts. They invited the principal, assistant director, and director of the school division to the hour-long production; however he doubted that the administration would be able to attend. At least, the principal commented that she would try to drop in sometime during the performance.

He is glad that his two French classes consist of the same bunch of students he teaches in Language Arts. He appreciates the fact that he gets to see them for approximately two periods every day. The daily double periods with them allows him to have more time with the same students. In turn, this helps to individualize his instruction and comments, at least to some extent. He tries to make all his classes as exciting and hands-on as possible; however, with 30-35 students per class, he needs to keep on top of classroom management and as a result his instruction sometimes becomes a bit more formalized.

It's about 15 minutes before the start of the school day. Mr. Urban makes a constant effort to socialize with at least some of the 65 staff members in the school. He heads to the staffroom for a cup of coffee. Some students are already at school. As he passes a group of girls talking and giggling, he smiles at the fashion diversity exemplified by them. Students are adorned with everything from nose and lip piercing and ripped jeans to designer skirts and expensive sandals. Fortunately the school is big enough so that most of the students are able to find a friend or able to fit into some group. But what

about those who don't? He knows the school does what it can, but he often wonders about those students who "get lost in the crowd".

Upon entering the staffroom, he sees Mr. Garnier, the other middle school French teacher. Mr. Urban greets him with a "Bonjour, comment ça va?" and remembers that he must meet with Mr. Garnier in the next few days to discuss the French Oratory Competition scheduled in a neighboring city later in the year. Mr. Urban grabs a coffee and sits down for five minutes to chat with his other colleagues. One of the teachers in the circle is talking about Amanda's mother. Apparently, the woman is very ill. Mr. Urban struggles to remember "Amanda", and pinpoints this student to be either the redhead or the blond curly-haired girl with glasses, both of whom are in Grade 6A. When asking for clarification from his colleague, Mr. Urban is told that Amanda is indeed the blond curly-haired girl. The middle school teachers decide to send some flowers to the hospital. Mr. Urban gladly donates to the fund and wishes the best for Amanda's mom.

As the bell rings, he sees the school principal enter the staffroom. Instantly, he is reminded that he needs to make an appointment with her, too. Mr. Urban is in the middle of his MEd program at the local university. He recently found out that there is one class which will be offered during his school lunch hour. He is going to ask the principal if he can be excused from the school during that time to participate in this class. Luckily, he has no lunch hour supervision scheduled for this semester, thus allowing him to at least make the request.

Mr. Urban's first class is about to start. As he returns to his classroom, he sees the students hustling to get to their first class on time. He thinks, "My job is great. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Data Description

As stated earlier, much has been written about rural education, especially American rural education. Comparatively, little has been written about urban education, except in the area of inner city schools or which Foote (2005) refers to as "high-need" urban schools. When interviewing participants, they, too, had more to say about rural education, and, thus, the findings of this study are more descriptive of rural schools. Rural education either has many unique qualities which are easily identifiable, or it is easier to overgeneralize information concerning rural education. Urban education, on the other hand, deals with a much more heterogeneous array of issues. Terms like "poor", "inner city", "diverse", "suburban", and "affluent", are all indicative of urban education. Undeniably, urban education has certain specific characteristics as well, but because of the diversity within the area, it is difficult to generalize and generate as many definite traits. Thus, the data findings for urban education are comparably shorter than the rural findings.

Rural Community and School

Unquestionably, when interviewing participants about their rural teaching experience, the thread or main theme of "community" was developed from many diverse topics including the importance of the school, hospitality of community, socializing, a description of the rural student, parental involvement, and high expectations of the teachers. The following sections discuss these aspects of rural education.

Importance of the School

In various ways, the interviewees stated the school was a central cornerstone of the community. As Hannah said, *“Their school was [the community’s] pride and joy. The parents and community didn’t want to take away, basically, the only thing that was left in the community.”* Joseph stated, *“Those communities were very attached to their schools, very committed to supporting their schools.”* Heidi remarked, *“The school gave the community a sense of pride.”* Benjamin said, *“They [the parents] were behind the school system.”* Paul stated, *“That [rural] community really supported its school.”* Jenny summarized these points when she said, *“As for activities in rural communities, the school is the hub for all the things that are happening... It is totally the center of town.”* In all rural data, the interviewees explained to some extent that the community and the school lived almost symbiotically. The school strengthened and was dependent upon the community and the community strengthened and was dependent on the school.

Hospitality of Community

The participant teachers who moved into a new rural community either felt welcomed or shunned when first arriving to that community. There was little to no middle ground. Some interviewees described the rural community in which they worked as, *“welcoming, inviting, and supportive.”* Other interviewees described the school community as *“very shut off to people who are moving in”, “a fearful place”,* and *“hell on wheels”*. Jenny described her first rural experience in the following way. *“It was a very different experience for me in turns of feeling comfortable, confident to make mistakes, or feeling like I could be myself. I didn’t feel that way at all. So that was a very difficult year.”* The way in which some participants described the community was

associated, at least somewhat, with their overall enjoyment of teaching and personal satisfaction found within the school. Benjamin stated, *“I never saw anyone...I went to school and I taught...What I remember in [this town] in terms of community was the wind howling through my little trailer.”* In this case, the interviewee had a less enjoyable time professionally, as well.

Many participants who had experienced teaching in a variety of rural communities found that their time spent in one community was often very different in comparison to their other rural teaching experience(s). For example, Jenny shares one of her first days in a rural school. She says:

The first day when I came in and I sat down in the staff room, a woman said to me, “You’re in my seat!” I thought, “Oh, you have a seat? Where’s my seat, then?” She said, “The new people sit over there.” I thought, “Okay.” So I went and sat over there. I thought, “This is a minefield. I’ll just sit in the corner and hope it gets better.”

Further into her interview, Jenny describes the next rural school she worked in:

The sense I had from the moment I got there was that: “We’re excited to have you. How would you like to get involved?” So many of the good things about a small town...It’s a place where you are critically important. It’s a place where you are very welcomed, if it’s that kind of a community.

Socializing

The idea that “everybody knows everybody” was another point that surfaced through all participants’ rural teaching stories. Paula stated, *“There were many times when people said hello to me, and I didn’t know them. I sure got the feeling that*

everybody knew who I was.” Joseph found that when he started teaching in a rural community, *“Within a week, I knew everybody and everybody knew me.”*

The social camaraderie that existed in rural communities couldn’t help but have a positive effect in the school. Elaine believed that in rural areas she *“got to know the parents better.”* Elaine continued by explaining, *“A lot of these parents [her students’ parents] have become friends, and I really like that.”* Joseph commented, *“It’s easier to make a phone call to a mom or a dad and say, ‘This is [Joe] calling from the school.’ They know [Joe] and [Joe] knows them.”* Heidi was thankful for the help she received from the community during one of the French exchanges she organized for her students. *“They [the community] were extremely, extremely helpful when a class exchange from Quebec took place.”*

On the other hand, some teachers felt somewhat frustrated to constantly have their personal lives known by everyone. Benjamin and Paula commented on their infrequent visits to the community bar. Benjamin knew his presence in the bar would be seen by the entire community: *“If I go to the bar and have a beer, there’s my truck outside. Well, everybody knows it. Everybody knows I’m there.”* Paula commented on the gossip that probably spread because of her visit to the bar. *“The one weekend a few of us went to the bar, and everybody heard about it...They [the community] might say, ‘Oh the teachers are hooting it up!’”* Negative repercussions, which were often judgemental in nature, resulted from close community relationships. Jenny and Benjamin specifically pointed out that in a rural community *“You are under a microscope.”* and *“Your business is everyone’s business”*. The participants’ comments reflected the idea that in rural

environments, because the teacher is considered part of “the family”, his or her private business is readily known and accessible to other members of the family community.

A Description of the Rural Student

The participants remarked that in rural environments, they had more time to work with individual students and were more aware of individual student and class interests. Because of this, they got to know their students very well, and they commented on general personality traits of their rural students. When comparing rural and urban students, although participants thought the cognitive abilities of both types of students were comparable, the way they described characteristics of rural and urban students differed greatly. They described the rural student as a “good” person; a person who focuses on social relationships. Benjamin described his group of rural students to be, *‘just honest kids, nice kids.’* Joseph described his group of kids as individuals who *“want to know you as a person. Rural students want to know about their teachers in a deeper way. The rural student is more focused on relationships.”* Elaine said, *“Students bring to school their experiences while growing up. You find that rural students know a lot more about rural things than the city kids do.”* Paula described her rural students. *“In general, I thought they were very well-adjusted, supportive, little kids who just really had a good childhood. They were going to grow up and be quite nice people.”* Heidi said, *“Rural students have a simplicity about them.”* Jenny’s comment summed up the reason for the description given to rural students: *“I think that every community prepares their kids for the culture that they have or what they would need to have as a continuing member of that community.”* The participants’ responses reflected that in order for a rural student to thrive in the community in which he or she was raised, that individual

needs to be able to get along with the others of that community. Rural students therefore need strong social skills, and they need to be able to form strong relationships with one another.

Parental Involvement

Although interviewees stipulated that, in general within kindergarten to grade 12 schools, there was parental involvement in urban schools, overall, there was more parental involvement in rural schools. Elaine, Jenny, Joseph, and Paula's comments about parental involvement in rural schools included: *"Parents are highly involved"*, *"I wouldn't find it surprising for a parent to be in my classroom"*, *"Parents were always willing to volunteer at the school, or do things that were going to make the school better"*, and *"We had the moms coming in to sew costumes. You never felt like you were imposing upon them or asking too much. They were there for you, with open arms, wanting to do whatever they could."*

However, having the parents involved in the school didn't necessarily mean that the parents always supported the teachers. Hannah found that in the one rural community in which she taught, there was little support from home. For example, one time Hannah had a grade 5 boy who punched his classmate on the nose. Hannah said, *"When I had called dad his exact response was, 'Yah, I told him if anyone got in his face to punch him back in the face.'"* Benjamin concluded there were always some parents who would be against the teacher whether in rural or urban environments.

As well, Heidi and Benjamin stated the point that sometimes a positive parental attitude towards education is lacking in rural communities. Heidi said, *"Many rural families neglect a certain academic attitude."* Benjamin specifically clarified: *"Again, I*

really want to make the distinction – it’s not intelligence. There are lots of bright kids in this community. It’s just a matter of maybe they [the parents] don’t see the value of education.” Benjamin expanded on this point stipulating the employment opportunities of the community didn’t support education. *“Then you see people at the mine, 18-year-old kids who graduated out from high school. They’re in first year out at the mine. They make \$20,000 more than a teacher. What’s the advantage of education, then?”* These points show the attitude of parents and the community has an impact on the educational success of the students.

High Expectations for Teachers

Again and again, the teachers talked about the very high expectations that were placed on them when they taught in rural communities, much more so than in urban communities. In fact, sometimes, unrealistic expectations were placed on them. On this, Jenny commented:

I recall being told when I was a LINC [Local Implementation and Negotiation Committee] member, and this was one of my reasons for leaving rural Saskatchewan, I was told, “If you are a teacher, you are the school board’s employee whenever we need you, 24-7.” That’s exactly what a person told me. I said, “The Education Act says nine to four, and I do way better than that. Do you really think it is reasonable to expect 24-7? How do you expect me to be a family person? How do you expect me to balance my priorities?” And she said, “That’s not my problem.” I thought, “Oh, that really says it all, doesn’t it?”

Jenny then continues and compares these rural school expectations to her urban school expectations. She said, *“So, I find it interesting that having moved to [the city], I never*

feel that way anymore. On the other hand, part of the reason I don't is because nobody even knows who I am."

Joseph highlights another crucial component of this topic. Not only are rural teachers expected to become involved in the community professionally, but privately, as well. Joseph explains:

I made very sure that I was deemed to be a contributor to the community even though I was living outside the community. That they respected. I was often told that by the people of the community, "We know that you make the extra effort to be with us. That is important to us".

Such participant comments reflect that being a rural teacher isn't just a profession, it's a lifestyle!

Rural Teaching Responsibilities

When asked to describe their experiences teaching in a rural school, the participants often first referred to the community of the school, and then described specifics of the job. The main identifiers about teaching in rural schools to which participant referred included: variety of subject areas, instructional differences, administration and support, resources, extra curricular and supervision, and professional development.

Variety of Subjects

Perhaps one of the greatest distinctions given to rural teaching was summarized by Heidi. She said, *"The elasticity of a teacher has to be much greater in a rural school than in an urban school."* Almost all of the participants commented that they taught a greater variety of subjects in rural communities. Elaine was the one participant who did

not allude to this point, however, she was the only participant whose subject area was entirely in early elementary. In general, the participants recognized that they had more classes to teach in rural schools and this greater variety of classes meant they spent more time preparing for class. Hannah said, *“In [the rural community], we had to do it all. There were no specialists.”* Joseph’s comment paralleled Hannah’s: *“The number of staff members with a specialization was less than what was available in the urban settings.”* Jenny reflected that there was a positive side of having to teach a wide range of subjects and that was she became less bored with her job because of the variety associated with it. The participants’ experiences highlight that due to numbers, fewer teachers can be hired; hence fewer specialized teaching opportunities are able to be filled.

Alongside the idea that there was less specialization in rural schools was the fact that there was much less “departmental collaboration” in rural schools. When participants talked about their rural experience, in most cases, there was no talk of departmental meetings or subject collaboration opportunities. Joseph said, *“When I was working in a small school, ‘I’ was the math department.”* Paula was the only participant whose comments about subject collaboration did not reflect the aforementioned point. However, Paula did state that she thought this particular rural division was not the norm. She said, *I think [this rural school] was ahead of its time in the collaboration model. I remember in even my first year teaching...we had grade-alike meetings where all the grade 3 teachers in the whole division got together and planned units.”*

Although the rural teachers taught a wider variety of subjects, as a whole, participants were concerned that their school couldn’t offer the same diverse range of subjects available in urban schools. This point held especially true for specialized

subjects such as fine arts. Benjamin commented on the lack of opportunities in fine arts that he saw in his school. “*We don’t have a band program here.*” Joseph said:

In the urban setting, I think that the nature of instruction and the opportunities available for kids are stronger. I always had a bit of a concern when I was teaching in small rural schools that our students didn’t have enough options available to them. I would look at the big city high school that was able to offer so many more courses my students could have benefited from or would have been interested in. We couldn’t offer them because we just didn’t have the staff...all the shop classes, economics classes, and specialty courses. The other students [urban students] would have had them available to them, and we just couldn’t offer them.

Instructional Differences

The participants had a variety of comments regarding various aspects of rural instruction. Joseph stipulated that in rural schools he often had to teach multi-grade classrooms. Hannah and Benjamin commented on the lack of preparation time and stated that they enjoyed more hours of preparation time when they worked in urban schools.

All participants spent some time talking about classroom management.

Participants stated that classroom management was either more of a concern for rural teachers, or classroom management presented at least similar challenges for rural teachers as compared to urban teachers. However, Benjamin said that the rural schools had the *potential* for more classroom management problems:

I think what happens in the city, when you start to get extreme problems with behaviour, for example, you’ll have kids move to another school, particularly to

the inner city schools. Whereas in the rural school, there is no other school. This is it. I know that there is at least one student in our school, and there have been a few who I know about, who probably have pushed the rules much further than they could have in the city, with very little consequences.

Heidi alluded to a very similar experience in one of her rural schools. She was not pleased with what one student “got away with”. Elaine, with her background in early literacy, thought that recently:

Some of the rural [kindergarten] students, the boys in particular, are a little bit livelier than the boys in the city... At least that's what I see, this year. I have a huge class of boys in the city. I think the rural boys are more inclined to wrestle. They might play more outside and do those kinds of things.

Other than the above references, all other comments about rural classroom management stated the exact opposite – discipline was less of a concern and less of a challenge within rural schools. Jenny thought there was more support from administration in the rural areas. Joseph said, “*With regard to classroom management, the small rural school is a little more laid-back and informal. That always leads to an easier level of comfort for the teacher. I really sensed that.*”

Administration and Support

It was interesting to note that all participants described urban administration neutrally or positively. However, when describing the rural administrators, more often their comments were at least somewhat negative. The main issue that concerned the participants within rural schools was the lack of administrative support, particularly in regard to disciplinary matters. Hannah said, “*If you came to him with a problem about a*

student, he would side more with the student, so that he didn't ruffle any of the parent's feathers." Benjamin was also frustrated with some of the ways his administrators dealt with student issues. *"There are a lot of community pressures here. I think there have been a lot of attempts to make everybody happy all of the time. I don't think that has been effective."* Benjamin indicated that at times his principal "sided" with the parents and gave little support to the teacher. *"If you have administration immediately agreeing [with parents] without even talking to the teachers, that's a bit of a negative aspect of our school."* Both Hannah, Benjamin, and Jenny identified that rural administrators undergo a certain amount of pressure from the community. Hannah stated that her principal almost seemed scared of the community because there were board members from the community who worked very closely with the director. Jenny described a student plagiarism issue that she needed to bring to her principal's attention. Jenny received little support from her principal. *"Basically, it came down to the fact she wanted me to be flexible because the mom wouldn't go away."*

Almost all of the participants felt uncomfortable with some of their rural administrators. Heidi noted that she had very little trouble working with her administrators except in one rural town. *"There was one guy [an administrator] who instilled fear in us. The teachers did not feel comfortable with him. He would say, 'This is not right, and this is right. This is not good, and this is good.' Who is he to judge?"* Although Paula said she liked the rural principal of her school, she still described this principal as *"a little stressful to work under"*. Benjamin also did not feel totally comfortable with his rural principal. He felt that he always had something to prove to this principal. Jenny described one of her rural principals as *"a weak principal"*, but

Jenny recognized that this principal had a lot of issues with which to deal. *“She was a brand new principal in a difficult situation, and she also had a brand new vice principal under her”*.

Another general comment about rural administration involved the abundance of teacher evaluations done by principals, assistant directors, and directors and the flavour of these assessments. Paula talked about the number of times the administration came into her classroom to do evaluations on her performance. *“I had two formal evaluations from the director, two from the assistant director, and four visits from my principal all in the first year. Now, that was a bit excessive.”* Benjamin was very pleased with the evaluations his administrators gave him, but he didn’t understand some the comment he received:

They [the evaluation reports] say right on them: “absolutely fantastic classroom management skills”, “very strong presenting skills”, “mutual respect is abundantly evident in the classroom”, “learning is going on”, and so on and so on. All these wonderful teaching things, and then there will be something along the lines of, “He was wearing jeans.” ... I always felt a little bit like I am under the gun for things that are not really a big deal because these little things are all there are.

When talking about administration, the topic of meetings surfaced. Participants described these meetings as top-down mandatory meetings. Participants identified these meetings as general staff meetings, before-school meetings, impromptu meetings, or grade-divisional meetings. Paula said, *“It was kind of a pain, but we had this principal, and she would have a lot of meetings!”* Benjamin stated,

“Mondays we have meetings after school twice a month. One is a division meeting. One is the general staff meeting...Then, we tend to have about one special-reason meeting called per month, too. So, we’re kind of a little busy with that sort of thing.”

When Heidi described her typical rural day, she included: *“Sometimes there were meetings before classes, especially during report card time.”* Hannah summarized the results of some of these meetings when she said, *“The rural principal seemed to like to delegate more.”* Joseph’s comment supported Hannah. Joseph knew first-hand *“as a [rural] administrator, you have to share the leadership because you don’t have a lot of administrative time.”*

Resources

In general terms, all teachers commented that the rural schools they taught in had as good and often better resources than were available in their urban schools. One specific area where rural resources often surpassed those of urban was in the area of computers. This point was highlighted in a number of ways. Jenny said she had much better access to computers in the rural schools.

We had a one-to-four computer-to-kid ratio in [the rural school]. In [the city school], I think it works out to one computer for every 200 kids...Some of that [computer accessibility] has to do with the way technology grants have been given. Urban schools had no access to technology grants, and rural schools did. So that is part of that particular piece.

Benjamin was very pleased with the computer resources at his school. *“We have a brand new computer lab. Our computer lab was new five years ago, and it was completely*

updated last year. We are right on the cutting edge in that regard as compared to other schools.” Hannah stated the importance that her school placed on technological resources:

The technology was a big thing in [the rural community] though. We were fortunate when we had renovated the school, to have four desktop computers in each room and a cart of laptops for our computer class. So they did go crazy over the technology.

In addition to computers, four of the seven participants described how well-stocked the library was within their rural schools. In fact, Jenny stated, in her experiences, the rural libraries were better stocked than the urban. Both Benjamin and Hannah said that, when they needed library support materials whether it be in the form of student books, reference books, or teaching resources, they more often than not found all they needed. In addition, Jenny stated that when she found the library to be lacking resources on a specific topic, she would simply talk to the librarian. The library would then make a request and acquire more books:

When I taught in [the rural community] I could say, “You know, I will be teaching a unit on masks, and we only have two books on masks. I would like three or four others. These are some titles. Can you check and see if there are some others you can find?” The librarian would say, “Sure.” She’d place an order once a month. So the next month there would be ten books on masks.

The topic of special needs also surfaced when talking about the availability of school resources. Hannah did not think that rural special needs programs were any better or any worse in either rural or urban settings. *“Both [special needs] students had*

educational assistants who were assigned directly to them, and both had a personal program plan to follow. So they were both given the same advantages.” In many cases, though, the teachers reported that special needs programs, for general cases, were better in rural schools as compared to urban schools. The participants reported having more teacher assistance in rural schools. Paula stipulated:

“As for special needs programs, it seems to me that in [the rural school], they had two children with Down Syndrome, and I think they had a .5 special education teacher for two children. Well, that is unheard of [in the city]... At the time, I did not know how good that support was, because we certainly didn’t get that in the city.”

Also on the topic of special needs, Benjamin said, *“We actually have more TAs per student in this school than we did in the city, and our class sizes are smaller. I think students here get more one on one work than they would in [the city].”* Elaine said, *“That [rural] school has an incredible special needs program. I think it is much better in that school division than it is in the city.”*

Although the abundance of rural teacher assistants was positively noticed, in some cases, the quality of rural teacher assistants and resources room teachers was questionable. Jenny stated, *“The resource teacher, when I was in [the rural community], was a guy they hired with no resource training.”* Benjamin stated that he liked all of the teacher assistants who worked within his school, but many of these teacher assistants lacked formal education:

Not all of them have the training that they should have to be a TA...In the city you will find that TAs have more of that academic background. Even just when you

talk about dialect and how people speak in the city compared to here. There's a lot of "I seen" going on [in the rural school], you know.

Extracurricular and Supervision

When talking about extracurricular activities, Jenny identified an official commandment to be followed by a rural teacher: *Thou shalt do extracurricular!*" This commandment was especially true for the teachers who taught in middle school and high school. Joseph reminisced: *"I also remember all the extracurricular activities that teachers are expected to organize and participate in within a small school."* The participants' stories reflected that because there is only a limited number of staff members in a rural school, and a diverse range of standard extracurricular programs, the rural staff is expected to coach such things as boys and girls, junior and senior, volleyball, basketball, badminton, and track and field. There is almost a tangible pressure placed upon staff members to be involved with extracurricular activities. Jenny said, *"I know teachers who don't do extracurricular, but they are not well-regarded."*

The participants specifically stated that rural students are, in general, more involved in their school and the activities sponsored by their school. Jenny explained why this point was true. *"In urban settings, kids have many more extracurricular opportunities outside the school, and so some kids never become connected to the school at all. This is not so much of an issue in rural schools, because there is nowhere else to be."*

It was often difficult for participants to schedule extracurricular practices and meetings. For example, Heidi found it frustrating when trying to schedule choir practices for the Christmas Concert. *"You always had to coordinate the activities with all the*

other activities. That was a problem because some students wanted to be in everything all the time.” Jenny informally agreed with Heidi when Jenny said, *“One of the things in a rural settings is the same kids are on the basketball team, and volleyball team, and in the drama program because there are only so many kids.”* Benjamin said the location of many of his students affected his practices. *“Here I can’t really hold morning practices because there are so many bus kids who don’t arrive early enough.”* Therefore, in addition to the extra pressure and expectations placed on these rural teachers to become actively involved in extracurricular programs, once volunteering to lead these activities, the volunteer teacher must be flexible in terms of when practices and meetings are to take place.

Supervision in rural schools was also more demanding for the rural teachers of this study. As mentioned above, one obvious characteristic of rural schools is that they are typically smaller than their urban counterparts. Because of the size of the rural student body, staff numbers decrease, however, the amount of time a rural and urban student has for lunch and recesses is comparable. Paula’s rural and urban teaching experiences supported this point. She said, *“The smaller the staff the more you have to do because there are still the same amount of recesses and lunchtimes [in both schools].”* Jenny stipulated, *“Also in the rural communities, it was expected that we would sign up for supervision. I don’t have to do supervision in the city.”* Benjamin confessed that in his rural schools, he had some type of supervisory duty every day. Joseph’s schedule also involved much supervision, and he explained: *“When noon hour came along, it was a very rare occasion when I could just sit down and have a free hour or a break.”*

Hannah spoke of her time-consuming supervisory duties, as well. She described a typical supervision day.

Whereas in the rural system because there was fewer staff, our supervision days usually consisted of one whole day. Because there were busses, we had to be there by quarter to eight in the morning and supervise until about quarter to nine. Then we supervised out at recess time for 15 minutes, and at lunch time we had a rotational lunch hour. So we ate for 10 minutes. Then we were either inside the building supervising for about 15 minutes. Then we were outside supervising for 15 minutes. There was supervision in the afternoon and supervision after school for busses, which took about 15 or 20 minutes, as well. So it was a very, very, very long day, as opposed to [the city]. There [in the city] it was more like a short stint of 15 minutes here or 15 minutes there. It didn't seem to add up to as much.

Professional Development

When participants spoke about professional development opportunities in rural schools, they mostly talked about attending conferences. In general, the participants were very pleased with the conferences and professional development sessions they attended while teaching in rural schools. Heidi stated, *"The districts came together and did some fascinating things with these conferences."* As well, participants felt that most administrators allowed them the opportunity to attend conferences, if release time was available. Both Joseph and Hannah made the same points when they said, *"I've never been turned down for anything I wanted to do for professional development."* and *"I don't even think that the opportunity to go into [the city] for a professional development course was restricted, in either case [rural or urban]."* Joseph stated that at times he

wanted to go to out-of-province conferences and was unable to because of lack of professional development funds. He continued: *“I never felt badly about it. I understood that. But I would say that that is sort of a barrier from time to time that we were faced with – the shortage of money to provide professional development.”* Other comments expressed as barriers to professional development in rural communities were the accessibility of subs, getting professionals to come into the community to facilitate professional development, and as Jenny stated, the perception in some rural communities that *“professional development is a paid holiday for teachers”*.

Urban Community and School

This section presents the data on the urban community and its school. The data within this study specifically reflected issues relating to community involvement, parental involvement, the extremes, policies and procedures, and a description of the urban student.

Community Involvement

Most participants agreed that interactive community involvement was not as prominent in the urban school setting. Jenny noted in the city, the community did not have the same ownership over a school. The school is often viewed as a facility, not a central place for community gatherings. Paula remarked, *“In the [urban] community, I am not sure that the facility itself was used a whole lot for any of the community events, other than school functions.”* The data illustrated that because of bigger numbers, it was harder for a close relationship to be formed between the school, parents, and the community at large. As an administrator, Joseph reflected:

“The connect between the school and the family is not as strong as it is in the rural setting. So it’s more difficult sometimes to communicate what needs to happen for a child in an urban setting than it is in a rural setting.”

Parental Involvement

Although two participants spoke of strong parental support and involvement within their urban school experience, five participants spoke about the lack of parental presence. Elaine said that she did not interact with parents as much. *“In the city, sometimes I have no idea what the parents do.”* Jenny commented, *“If a parent is in my classroom in [the city] I wonder what’s wrong?”* Heidi explained that many of the city parents are more likely to be professional and extremely busy. Paula agreed with Heidi, adding *“They [the city parents] will question you more, and they are not afraid to challenge you.”*

The Extremes

Another central theme that grew from the participants’ stories was the idea that working in urban schools meant the teachers were more involved within a diverse selection of students many of whom had specialized interests, talents, or needs. Paula, Benjamin, Jenny, and Joseph agreed that the urban schools were more apt to deal with high special needs cases. Heidi, Jenny, and Paula identified such special needs as ESL and cultural diversity issues as an increasingly important factor within many urban schools. Paula stated, *“[This urban school] was like a mini United Nations. There was such diversity in that school.”*

Policies and Procedures

Participants recognized that regimented practices were more common in urban schools, and this, in turn, affected the way in which their urban school was run. Often, their urban schools relied heavily on policies for such things as attendance, enrollment into classes, and discipline issues. The reliance on these policies was frustrating to some participants, especially if they were a new or inexperienced urban teachers. Paula reminisced,

I remember the secretary, the first week. She was getting annoyed with me because I was not used to having to do the whole safety attendance thing with the children. I learned very quickly, if someone is not there right away, you don't just mark absent in the attendance book. You phone down to the secretary directly, and you find out right away why they are absent. Whereas in [the rural school], if someone was absent, you just accepted them as absent.

Jenny and Benjamin recognized that urban schools are more “bureaucratic by necessity”.

Jenny noted that in order for her to utilize the school premises during after-school hours, she needed to fill out forms, and the request needed to pass through administration.

Because of such formalities, Joseph explained that urban teachers “*have to take more time to understand the dynamics of the staff and the dynamics of the building.*”

Description of the Urban Student

It was interesting to note how participants, in general, described the characteristics of an urban student. Jenny said the urban student was “*less well-rounded*”, and Benjamin said the urban student “*places more value on education*”.

Heidi said the urban student has a whole different attitude. “*They go to a big school, in a*

big city, come to school on public busses, and have city-like attitudes that they collect from homes and their communities.” In sum, Joseph stated, “Urban students need to handle societal pressures in a different way. They need to be a bit more sophisticated in how they respond to people.”

The participants explained that urban students are in contact with many more diverse people. For example, urban students share their seat with strangers when using public transportation. They interact with waiters and waitresses who they don't personally know when frequenting restaurants. They have more opportunities to see a variety of cultures within their neighbourhood or within a classroom setting. Heidi noted that urban students must associate with so many more individuals both in and outside the school, and being involved with distinct cultures and varied social environments creates a student who is savvier in the way he or she responds to diverse people and situations.

Urban Teaching Responsibilities

One distinct physical characteristic of an urban school is that the urban school has a bigger student enrolment and therefore employs a larger staff than most rural schools. This obvious, but pertinent, point has many repercussions on the experiences of its teachers. When talking about their urban teaching responsibilities, participants commented on instructional difference, preparation time and specialization, administration and support, resources, extracurricular activities and supervision, and professional development.

Instructional Differences

As teachers described their experience teaching within an urban school, a central theme emerged from most of their stories. This message was paraphrased by Heidi when

she said, *“The more students there are, the more the individual can get lost.”* Paula compared her resource teaching within urban and rural schools. When she talked about urban schools, she said, *“I can honestly say I didn’t know the children like I wanted to.”* Heidi was concerned that this reality of urban schools could have negative effects on the student. *“That lost student who is timid, or insecure, or fearful, or comes from a culture where you don’t put yourself forward, that person can diminish into a nobody, and no one even notices it.”* Hannah presented another side to this argument. She said there were severe ramifications (such as bullying) for rural students who were “different” and didn’t conform to the norm. *“Whereas in the [city] system, we had two groups of almost every grade. You could always find a friend.”*

For middle school and high school teachers, large class size affects teaching. Joseph explained, *“It’s more difficult to get to know all the players...Sometimes the personal relationships that make teaching work are not present because it’s a larger setting.”* Jenny reflected on how teacher-student interaction can affect disciplinary situations with urban students:

In the hallways, I know maybe a sixth of the kids. If a kid does something that’s inappropriate, the odds of me even knowing the kid are not good. If I say, “Come with me,” for example, and they don’t, what do I do? We have to check the video tape and check if any people in the office know that kid. So then we chase that kid down. So that’s very different.

Hand-in-hand with instruction is classroom management. All participants stated that classroom management in a city school was either the same or more difficult than in

a rural school. Participants stated that because of extremes, some behaviors are accepted in urban school that would not be accepted in rural schools. Jenny gave some examples.

If a kid even swore at me in a rural school, they would be suspended for days.

Kids don't swear at me at [my city school], but they don't because I am me. They swear at other teachers, and they don't get suspended. And the kid that brought the knife to school didn't get suspended.

Paula agrees that she found classroom management much more challenging in urban schools simply because of the “*demographics of the school*”. Joseph described his classroom management as “*a little more formal in rural schools*”. Hannah and Benjamin found classroom management to be more or less the same in both environments; however, Benjamin did state that “trust” was an issue in urban classroom. Because the teacher simply does not know the students as well in the cities, the teacher cannot have the same sense of trust with them.

Preparation Time and Specialization

Many participants reported that they had to teach fewer subjects in urban schools and as a result, they had more preparation time. Jenny, Hannah, and Benjamin stated there were great differences in the urban-verses-rural preparation time. Jenny, a high school teacher, said, “*[In my urban school] I have approximately 20 percent prep time, which makes a massive difference compared to when I was teaching in rural schools.*” Hannah, as an elementary teacher, had much less preparation time than a high school teacher, but she still had more preparation time when she was an urban elementary teacher as compared to a rural elementary teacher.

Heidi commented that teachers who teach in urban areas more readily teach within specialized subjects. This point was supported by the teachers who taught in middle school and high school. However, Hannah reported that there were specialized teachers for her urban elementary music and French classes. In the participants' views, because urban teachers were more specialized, urban education had distinct characteristics. Benjamin, Joseph, Jenny, and Heidi all agree that urban students "*have more choice*". As well, the establishment of subject departments was a result of teacher specialization. Benjamin, Paula, and Joseph recognized and appreciated the professional support they received from the subject departments in which they were involved. The urban teachers talked highly of their involvement with and support from subject departments.

Administration and Support

For the participants, the overall support and attitude towards administration was more positive in their urban schools. Benjamin stated that he felt that urban administration had more confidence in him as a teacher and gave Benjamin more "*professional credit*". Benjamin appreciated this type of upfront and "*behind the scenes*" support. Elaine liked the fact that the administration "*lets me do basically what I want*". Hannah agreed that in her urban school, she knew that she had support behind her and "*could pretty much try anything I wanted to*". Paula paraphrased why administrators were less involved with the teachers' affairs. "*When you get to the bigger schools, there are more issues going on. I think principals and the administrators are just happy if you are doing your job, staying out of their way, and no parents are complaining.*" The urban administrators referred to in this study were more apt to have confidence in their

teachers and to simply “let” teachers do their job. Hannah said, “*They [her urban administrators] pretty much let their teachers be leaders and allowed the teachers to make a lot of decisions on their own.*” Perhaps this was one of the reasons why, in almost every urban experience, the participants talked highly of their administration. They described their administration as “*excellent, supportive, open-minded, and as being good mentors and pro-staff*”.

Joseph described what it was like being an urban administrator. To start with, he appreciated the fact that in an urban school there was more time specifically slotted for administrative needs. As well, he found the idea of working with a team of administrators highly effective and allowed him more opportunities to be “*collaborative and do perception checking*”. Again because of the larger number of students and teachers with whom he dealt, his day was extremely busy. Paula and Jenny understood administrators lead busy lives; however, both stated that they would have loved to have been able to spend more time simply talking with their leaders. Paula said, “*You know, [in the city] in eight years, I never once talked to the director. He wouldn’t know me from a hole in the ground.*” Jenny explained that she would have loved to have had more personal time with the principal to discuss what she was excited about in her classroom. She wanted to share with him what she had been teaching. She concluded that urban teaching can be “*very isolating because there aren’t other teachers in your room in the same way that there were in rural Saskatchewan.*”

Resources

Comments pertaining to urban resources differed depending on what type of resource was identified. Participants mentioned there were fewer computer resources in

urban environments. Elaine remembered in her urban experiences, in general, she lacked resources. Hannah thought her urban school library was “*very, very well stocked*” and then commented that this particular school was quite rich.

One area of resources upon which all participants agreed was far better in urban schools was accessibility to teacher resources. Elaine, Benjamin, Joseph, Hannah, Paula, and Jenny either directly stated or alluded to the fact that if their school did not have enough professional resources, they could always easily find what they needed by visiting educational sources throughout the city. Participants talked about the easy accessibility to such things as the professional teaching library at the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, the teacher stores situated throughout the urban center, urban divisional offices, and public libraries. Jenny was especially appreciative that the travel time to these professional resources was much less when she lived in the city as compared to the country.

In the case of high special needs, people resources were better in the city. Benjamin stated, “*There are more people who are trained to deal with the extreme special needs in the city then there are here.*” Heidi said teacher assistants need to be more specialized and better qualified for specific special needs. Jenny was pleased with the specialized assistance she got in urban schools. Jenny commented, “*I taught students [in the city] who were deaf so there is a translator in my room.*” and “*[In the city] if I have a student who doesn’t speak English, I also have a ESL resource person who helps.*” Joseph summed up the above by saying: “*In fact, for students who were profoundly affected with special needs, we couldn’t deal with them in our rural settings.*”

We had to send them to a program in a larger center where they could receive the kind of help they needed.”

Extracurricular Activities and Supervision

This study highlighted that extracurricular demands were less challenging in urban settings. Benjamin explained that numbers played a part in this issue. *“You are still only going to have one grade 7/8 boys’ volleyball team but twice as many teachers who are available to coach it.”* As well, scheduling practices wasn’t as cumbersome. Hannah said, *“Most students didn’t live long distances from the school.”* Benjamin agreed with Hannah’s point and as a result stated that he could hold morning practices at the school.

Jenny added the idea that it is not as important for urban students to become involved in extracurricular events because all kinds of specialized extracurricular activities can be found outside the school community. *“Also in urban settings, kids have many more extracurricular opportunities outside the school, and so some kids never become connected to the school at all.”* Heidi commented how the interests of urban student might be slanted toward extracurricular activities specifically suited for their culture. Heidi said, on weekends, *“the East Indians learn their Urdu and the Chinese will learn their Cantonese.”* All of these issues pinpoint the fact that there are far less expectations placed on the urban teacher in terms of being involved with extracurricular events.

A similar point can be made when addressing school supervisory duties. When asking about urban lunch duties, Benjamin sighed, smiled, and said, *“Our lunches were ours.”* Hannah and Benjamin added that in their urban schools, lunch supervision was

done by parents and community members who got paid for their time. In general, when talking about urban teaching experiences, participants barely referred to morning, lunch, afternoon, and after-school supervisory duties.

Professional Development

The focus and accessibility of professional development was, by far, more positive in urban schools. For example, it was easier to find substitute teachers in urban schools, and there was more availability of professional resources. Joseph and Benjamin spoke of greater opportunities for a more positive collaborative network of individuals both inside and outside the school.

Elaine, Joseph, and Jenny recognized that for them, professional development was something they accepted as their personal responsibility whether teaching in a rural or urban setting. Elaine said:

Education is not that different from medicine, for example. Or I don't think it should be. We need to keep up on the latest research. I read as much as I can in magazines and stuff. I try to keep up on the latest trends and what they saying.

Joseph stated, *"I took responsibility for my own professional growth. I didn't expect others to hand it to me."* Jenny commented on much the same thing. She said she made the effort to improve herself through the constant efforts she puts towards her own professional development. Part of this included welcoming interns into her class whenever possible, sitting on professional development committees, and enrolling in long-term professional development courses.

When talking about professional development, Benjamin stated that within his urban school there was a much more *"collaborative environment"*. Paula said, *"You were*

on a learning assistance team...It was probably one of the best, collaborative, supportive, mentorship-like experiences I've had. It was absolutely key for my personal growth, for helping me meet the challenges of teaching." Joseph recognized the same advantages of working within an urban school when he said, *"When I went to this larger school, I had that team of people to collaborate with, to network with."*

Discussion of Teaching in Rural and Urban Schools

Although community involvement is an important component of any school, within this study, the rural community was more involved with "its" school because it "needed" to be. Using the metaphor of a human body, the rural school (as referred to in this study) was a heart which pumped oxygen and nutrients to the community (the rest of the body), sustaining its life. The rural schools described in this study provided entertainment, jobs, and education for the community. In turn, the rural community provided (to a large extent) the economic support for students, and a pride for its school. Chance (2002) stipulated the degree of mutual collaboration found between school and community directly reflect the success of both. This study reflects that rural communities must be very attached and committed to supporting their school because the school is a perpetuation of the community's existence. As Bourdieu (1991) believed, a key institution for establishing and extending members to a group or community is the school. Together the community and the school reproduce their culture and create the future for that community.

For the participants of this study, the rural school was a focal point of community life, and schools reflected the values and beliefs associated with parents, community members, employment opportunities, and religious or cultural groups. This study also

reflected that because the school and community are so closely related, higher expectations, sometimes even unrealistic ones, were placed upon rural teachers. An unwritten expectation of a rural teacher is that he or she must intricately become involved with the school community, both inside and outside its walls (Cross & Frankcombe, 1994; Balen, 1995). This study reflected how the many responsibilities and roles that a rural teacher must fulfill are, at times, taxing and stressful for the teacher (Balen, 1995; Ralph 2000). The teacher is in fact a role model for the entire community. This implies that being a rural teacher isn't just a profession, it's a lifestyle.

This research also reflected that while the small size of the school often contributes to the development of a family-like environment, the size of the school also makes it difficult to provide students with an array of curriculum options equal to that found in larger schools, particularly in larger high schools. These findings were consistent with the literature (Cotton, 1996; Howley & Eckman, 1997; Mulcahy, 1996; Newton, 1993). A positive ramification of smaller class numbers was that teacher and student had a closer, more personal relationship, and, hence, individualized instruction is more commonly the norm in rural schools (Collins, 1999; Newton, 1993; Stephens & Bhaerman, 1992; Sullivan, 2000). Closer student-teacher relationships probably could be one of the reasons why classroom management, for the most part, is less of a concern for the rural schools within this study.

Teachers in this study noted that within the rural school more hours were spent supervising recesses and noon hours. As well, more hours were spent leading extracurricular activities, especially in middle school and high school. As stated within the literature (Crockett et al, as cited in Government of Canada, 2001a; Kearney, 1994;

Newton, 1993; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2004; Stephens & Bhaerman, 1992), extracurricular activities have high participation rates and are very popular among most rural students. In an urban situation, students do various extra-curricular activities, often related to individual interests which are often outside school-sponsored events. Does the high rural-student participation in various extracurricular activities mean a better-rounded individual, and the limited, more-narrowly-focused participation of urban students create a more specialized competitive individual? The participants' general descriptions of rural and urban students alluded to these suggestions.

Mulchany (1996) and Kearney (1994) stated that in rural schools the requirements of children with special needs are better met, and many teachers in this study believed this to be true. For example, within this study, many rural schools had more teaching assistants employed per student as compared to urban schools. As well, within this study, although rural schools had fewer students with special needs, the rural school still often had a fulltime resource teacher. On the other hand, most participants in this study reported that the higher the severity of the special need, the less able the rural school was to deal with the issue. In sum, the data in this study showed that rural schools handled the needs of mild to moderate special needs cases as well as or better than in the city, but rural schools fell behind urban schools in their ability to handle high special needs situations.

Small schools tend to be less bureaucratic than urban schools (Collins, 1999; Kearney, 1994; Nachtigal, 1982; Newton, 1993). The teachers in this study felt that they could more easily communicate with administrators, other teachers, and staff members

when they were in rural schools. In general, they felt their rural school had less formal policies and procedures, and parents were less intimidated to frequent the school. However, the participants also stated they were sometimes overburdened by the administration's presence. For instance, participants said the number of teacher evaluations done by rural administrators and the number of meetings called by rural administrators were, at times, excessive. Participants stated that rural administrators paid more attention to what individual teachers were doing in their classrooms, and required the teachers to participate in more school-related meetings and activities. Utilizing a rural administrator's perspective, since less classroom release time is given to perform his or her administrative duties (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2004; Wilson, 1996), the administrator needs to delegate more in order to accomplish set goals. Interestingly, despite lack of delegated administrative time within rural schools, some teachers within this study were evaluated more often.

Nachtigal (1992) and the Government of Canada (2001a) stated that rural schools often have limited resources in such areas as up-to-date IT services and support services; however, this was not the case within this study. In general, the participants were quite pleased and confident with the resources provided within rural schools. In fact, in some areas, such as computers and library resources, many participants stated their rural schools were better supplied and stocked than their urban schools. A possible answer as to why this study opposes the research is that much has been done in recent years to make IT services available in rural areas. For example, grants were specifically given to rural schools for advancements in IT programs. Many rural schools were quick to take advantage of this opportunity.

When talking about their teaching experiences in rural schools, many participants stated their opinion that rural students have lower aspirations as compared to urban students. Rural students have limited career exposure and have parents who, in general, are not as highly educated when compared to urban parents (Burnell, 2003; Cartwright & Allen, 2002; Harmon, 1999; Haas, 1992). Participants recognized that the parents and people within the rural communities had fewer professional employment opportunities, and the parents and community, in general, placed less value on education. Cartwright & Allen (2002) stipulated that rural students have significantly lower academic aspirations than urban students.

The participants in this study described urban schools as schools with larger enrollments and a more diverse student population in terms of ethnicity, religion, and culture. Because of numbers, Kincheloe (2004) stated that students are more likely to be ignored or unintentionally overlooked. In this study, participants felt they didn't know their students as well, and they were sometimes concerned for the welfare of the timid, shy, or insecure, urban student. Other participants stated their teaching style, by necessity, became more formal and less individualized. As well, within this larger urban student body, the school culture illustrated a diverse set of beliefs and customs (Kincheloe, 2004), and this point was supported by participants when they described their school as a "*mini United Nations*", "*a heterogeneous population*" and "*culturally diverse*".

The challenges of classroom management are more demanding in urban schools as compared to rural schools (Cotton, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Weiner, 2003; Wilson &

Corbett, 2001). In general, participants agreed that classroom management was more challenging in their urban schools.

Participants agreed that the wealth associated with a school is not dependent on rural or urban differences. Instead, they stated that the wealth of the school is dependent on the interests and financial opportunities lying within specific rural and urban surrounding communities. This point is in contrast to Duarte (2004) who stated that urban schools were more likely to enroll students with lower socio-economic levels, and Cartwright and Allen (2002) who stated that rural schools were more likely to enroll students with lower socio-economic levels.

Urban teachers are more highly specialized than rural teachers (Cartwright & Allen, 2002), especially in middle and high school. All high school participants within this study commented on how they were better able to concentrate on teaching specialized subject matter when employed by urban schools. This was not as likely in their rural experiences. As well, within urban schools, participants talked about how working within subject departments assisted them with professional development. Their subject teams gave them support and allowed them the opportunity to share their ideas and experiences with each other. This, in turn, allowed them to grow professionally. For a number of other reasons, professional development was more accessible to the participants when they were employed in urban areas. For example, if they wanted to engage in professional development activities during school-time, finding a substitute teacher was easier. As well within their urban schools, finding and getting professionals to come into the school to facilitate professional development was easier. Finally, for the participants, professional resources such as books and conferences were more readily

available and accessible to teachers. All of these points highlighted how professional development was more accessible for the urban teachers within this study.

Summary

This study reflects that rural schools have a closer, family-like atmosphere as compared to urban schools. Again and again participants gave examples which illustrated that rural schools have closer ties to the community, and teacher-student relationships are more personal. Participants explained how their administrators had closer ties with them and were more knowledgeable about the specifics of classroom instruction and activities. When asked to compare rural and urban students, participants said students in smaller schools have the same academic potential as students in urban schools, yet these students are less likely to pursue tertiary education. Participants believed student involvement within extracurricular activities was more prominent in rural schools, and the expectation for teachers to be involved in extracurricular activities and supervision within the school was much higher. Participants also stated that providing diverse curriculum options in rural schools was difficult at times, and they stated their rural schools employed fewer specialized staff. One ramification of fewer specialized staff was that these rural teachers were more likely to have a greater variety of classes to teach. The lack of proximity to resources limited access to the academic materials that the participants could acquire. Extended travel time to professional conferences and courses cause additional challenges for these rural education teachers in the area of professional development. The lack of diverse parental and community role models with advanced academic achievements caused the rural students within this study to have lower academic aspirations.

As reflected by this study, within larger urban schools teachers experienced a higher diversity of student ethnicity, religion, and ESL needs. When focusing upon their urban experiences, the participants had fewer opportunities to provide individualized instruction. Although the larger enrollments of this study's urban schools provided students with greater curricular options, the larger size of the schools was the main cause for a more bureaucratic-type of administration. The participants who worked in urban schools had better access to educational resources and professional development courses and conferences. Within these urban schools, there were more opportunities for professional collaboration within school departments, but fewer opportunities to meet and talk with administration. As well, the urban teachers of this study had a greater variety of field trips options, and, for them, classroom management is a greater concern. The participants described the academic abilities of their urban students to be on par with their rural students; however the teachers described their urban students as being open to a greater variety of future career choices and "savvier" in the way they responded to diverse people and situations. When participants talked about their urban teaching experiences, they also highlighted that within their urban schools they have more preparation time, better access to high special needs programs, more support from administration, less pressure to coach extracurricular activities, and less supervisory duties.

All participants spoke of the benefits and challenges associated with teaching in rural and urban schools. However, no participant specifically identified either rural or urban education as being better. Participants merely described characteristics of the rural and urban teaching to be unique.

CHAPTER 5

MAKING SENSE OF IT

All schools, whether rural or urban, have a myriad of student needs, societal pressures, and community supports. This thesis reflects the local and contextualized experiences of eight participants (including myself). These experiences are specific to the schools in which they taught and to the time in which they taught. It is important to bear in mind that rural and urban schools and communities are dynamic. As Fullan (2003) explained, thriving schools establish conditions for continuous reform. Although data describing this study are fixed by words on the paper, a description of rural and urban education beyond this study is in a constant state of flux. This means the information that I have written exemplifying specific characteristics of rural and urban education is dependent upon the social and cultural settings of time, place, and mood. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated: “What we may be able to say now about a person or school or some other is given meaning in terms of the larger context, and this meaning will change as time passes” (p. 19).

The participants’ stories have now been told, and teachers’ experiences within rural and urban teaching contexts have been described. However, what broad issues are entwined within the data? In what package can the data results be wrapped? Where do the data fit in the big picture of teaching? What do the data tell us about the life of a teacher?

This chapter answers these questions at the macro level, in terms of the school and community, and at the micro level, in terms of teacher life histories and the roles that teachers play in schools. After these theoretical connections, as a form of praxis, I will share my personal teaching narratives of my rural and urban experiences. These narratives will explain how my story reflects the theoretical conclusions of this study.

School and Community: A Symbiosis

Intelligence plus character that is the true goal of education

Martin Luther King, 1948

A mutually beneficial or symbiotic relationship must exist between school and community if education is to shape and prepare students to be productive, successful citizens of a community. Such an idea is present throughout many scholarly writings. John Dewey (1916) recognized that the absence of a social environment in connection to learning is a chief cause for the isolation of a school from its community. Dewey (1916) stated: “The learning in school should be continuous with that out of school” (p. 416) and “[Community] isolation renders school knowledge inapplicable to life and so infertile in character” (p. 417). Dewey believed that educational ideas are only worthwhile to the degree that they can be implemented.

Dewey has been portrayed in many ways: educator, educational theorist, pragmatist, pacifist, socialist, activist, and public intellectual (Lawson, 1965; Schubert, 2000). These roles are illustrated throughout his books. Often his book titles are two words linked by the conjunction, “and”. By converting the “and” to “is”, we get an understanding of some of Dewey’s fundamental beliefs (Schubert, 2000). For instance, in *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey explained that engaged, thoughtful, democratic citizens are the result of quality education. Thus, democracy *is* education. In

The School and Society (1899), Dewey stated, “All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school” (Dewey, 1969a, p. 295). Thus, school *is* society. In *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), Dewey suggested that subject matter should focus on the child’s interests, curiosity, and concerns. From such individualized attractions, the curriculum should evolve. Therefore, the child *is* the curriculum. A final example of his ideologies is expressed in his book entitled: *Experience and Education* (1938). Within this book, Dewey explains that the social life of a child needs to be the basis for all training and growth, and, thereby, experience *is* education.

Such Deweyian ideologies support the theme of school-community symbiosis. School *is* community; community *is* school. They are symbiotic, and they are synonymous. For Dewey (1969b), “School is primarily a social institution” and “education, therefore, is a process of living” (p. 430). School should be a practice of self-directed learning, guided by the cultural resources provided by the community and school leaders. Within this socially interactive community, education begins by recognizing the child’s capacities, interests, and talents, and use these areas for the advancement of society. Deweyian education promotes personal reflection, learning through experience, and social and community interaction. School is a form of community life. Hence, for Dewey, school and community are interdependent and inseparable.

Paulo Freire had his own beliefs about the relationship between education and the community. Like Dewey, Freire insisted that educational activities should be a lived experience, and education is achieved through social interaction. Freire (1970) believed that through a “culturized education”, a curriculum dictated from the specific cultural needs and wants of the people and the community, all citizens will enjoy a free, dynamic,

and egalitarian society. Freire believed that education requires the enabling of people (especially the poor) to develop their own dialogue, voice, and knowledge based on social and cultural realities that they experience (Freire 1989; Greene, 2003; Taylor, P., 1993). Education can then be used to overcome their sense of powerlessness to act on their own behalf. “The freedom and strength of the individual is the strength of the group” (Hampton, 1999, p. 21). Within his writings, Freire adopted a revolutionary perspective in that he saw education as a liberating act, a move towards a classless Utopian state (Jarvis, 2001).

Critics question aspects of Freire’s utopian ideology. However, few query Freire’s basic beliefs. There is an undervalued relationship that exists between education and the community. It is through education that the poor will have a say in day-to-day decisions that affect their lives. Freire’s work has shown that social transformation and literacy are not mutually exclusive endeavors. Rather, healthy partnerships between the school and the community have far-reaching effects upon producing a strong state, and, therefore, a school must support, utilize, strengthen, and reflect its surrounding community’s needs, strengths, values, and ambitions.

Vygotsky is probably most widely known for his theory of the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD), which is described as the difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This type of support-learning or “scaffolding” has influenced many pedagogical approaches. However, the ZPD concept can also be applied to the school and the community. If the school is viewed as the child and the community viewed as a support, then the school will achieve more than it could on its own, if it capitalizes on the assistance of the community.

For example, it has been demonstrated that parental involvement promotes better student attendance, increased graduation rates, fewer grade retentions, increased student satisfaction with school, reduced numbers of negative behaviour reports, and higher achievement in academics (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). According to Levine and Lezotte (1995), high levels of parental involvement are characteristic of effective schools. If parents, extended family members, community members, teachers, and administration support the educational journey of a child, the child will be more successful in whatever he or she attempts. In fact, not only does the community need to support the school, Compton (as cited by Pashagumskum, 2005) believed the community needs to claim a moral responsibility for the upbringing of its youth and adolescents. As the proverb quote reads: “It takes a community to raise a child.”

In addition to the ZPD, Vygotsky (as cited in Moll, 1990) highlighted the relationship between education and society. Langford (2005) addressed how Vygotsky viewed education and community interests as inseparable ideas:

Vygotsky asserted that education should be based on the principles that the child is part of society and that learning is social. The school should encourage what is social within the child to blossom on an individual basis. What is relevant to social needs and issues determines the curriculum, preferably in such a way that the child sees social needs as its needs. (p. 124)

Like Dewey and Freire, Vygotsky believed it is important to use everyday activities and community interests to provide meaning for schooled concepts.

The community’s culture, customs, interests, and experiences are tightly engrained and represented within a school. Sergiovanni (1987) relayed a similar message

by stating, “People are bonded to one another as a result of their mutual binding to shared values, tradition, ideals, and ideas” (p. 61). As a result, values become a collective conscience that serves to guide the ethical and moral actions of individuals within an organization, such as a school. For example, the mission statement of the school and the classes offered within the school reflect such things as the community’s native language, the community’s religious beliefs, or the community’s economic base. Thus, to educate effectively, classroom activities need to authentically represent the culture and lifestyle of the community, and strong school-community partnerships need to be put in place. Community-based programs and workshops, community field trips, community guest speakers, and community-situated apprenticeships are examples of such partnerships.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) agreed that schools are reflective of the community’s culture, values, and attitude. Bourdieu (1991) believed schools are agents of “social reproduction”. For Bourdieu (1991), societal groups (which reflect similar norms and beliefs) are created and extended if members within these groups are not coerced. For one group to subordinate another without coercion, the subordinate group must come to accept the norms advocated by the dominating group as beneficial. For Bourdieu (1991), the key institutions for establishing and extending members within these groups are the family and the school. Together the community and the schools reproduce and perpetuate their culture and create the future society. As Dewey (1969a) said, schools are a type of “an embryonic community life” (p. 310), and are essential in the fostering of cultural transmission. “Schools are socializing institutions which reproduce both the values and ideologies of the dominant social groups and status rankings of the existing class structure” (Bennet & LeCompte, 1990, p. 12). Learning is not isolated or

autonomous; rather it is flavoured by interaction of community members and is, therefore, a product of that society.

The relationship between schools and community is far-reaching. Chomsky (2000) and Giroux (2005) believed public schooling is fundamental to a democratic society. “Schools are places where the young become socialized – where they learn to participate intelligently and constructively in the Canadian society” (Parkey et al., 2005. p. 163). Bertrand Russell stated the goal of education is to create “wise citizens of a free community (as cited by Chomsky, 2000, p. 39). As Fullan (1999) explained, a strong public educational system is mandatory to a social, political, and economic renewal of society. A democracy can only thrive when its citizenry is engaged in the continuous process of becoming educated. In this way, schools are critical agents of social cohesion. They are the common glue that binds society together (Fullan, 2003). Barber (as cited by Fullan, 2003) talked about what might happen if public education should falter:

The danger is that, as the public economies of developed countries grow, more and more people will see private education for their children as a rational lifestyle option...[original ellipsis points] If this were to occur, they would become correspondingly less willing to pay taxes to fund public education which, over time, would become...a poor service for poor people...Only if public education delivers (and is seen to deliver) real quality, can this unknown prospect be avoided. (p. 1)

Sergiovanni (2000) claimed schools need to be learning communities, collegial communities, caring communities, inclusive communities, and inquiring communities. Quality connections and relationships are key to building this sense of community.

Serviovanni (2000) further explains “sense of community”. Three characteristics need to be present in order for a school to form a connection with community. School-community members need to: share common social bonds, share a sense of identity and pride of a common place, share commitment to values, norms, and beliefs. Connections among people are created when they share ideas and values. This, in turn, creates a strong bond between people. Such close connects do not easily dissipate when hardships arise. Instead, these connects emanate support and direction during hard times. When schools become the type of learning community described by Sergiovanni, they become places where social justice is practiced. Mohr (2000) explained:

If [school] teaches students about society by example – by being a society that works through its issues in real time instead of talking about them. It magnifies problems and allows them to become fodder through which the whole school can learn. (p. 140)

School^{PLUS}: An Example of School and Community

The idea that symbiosis of school and community is vital towards the development of a free society is as popular today as it was in Dewey’s time. Although this educational philosophy has remained constant, these days, there have been many changes in the way we live and conduct our lives. Fullan (2003) referred to these changes as “complexities of twenty-first century living and learning” (p. 11). In order to meet the growing demands of today’s society, the roles schools play and are expected to play have been altered dramatically (Dryfoos, 1999; Tymchak, 2001). In *School^{PLUS}: A Vision for Children and Youth*, Tymchak (2001) explained why the new role of schools, specifically in Saskatchewan, has been altered and expanded. Tymchak stated there are

new and increasing societal pressures which must be addressed in education. These demands include such things, for example, as the growth in the number of school-aged Aboriginal youth, globalization- and information-explosion-era, the continual needs of child poverty and student violence, the increased frequency of pupil mobility, the challenges faced because of increasing numbers of single-parent families, the increase in immigrant populations, and rural depopulation issues. To effectively deal with these real and pertinent changes, meaningful partnerships must co-exist between schools, families, and the surrounding community. A description and explanation of these partnerships is contained within School^{PLUS}.

In February, 2002, School^{PLUS} was announced as a renewed focus within Saskatchewan Education. School^{PLUS} is, in fact, a type of school-community improvement plan. Salm (2004) described School^{PLUS} as a new initiative within Saskatchewan education, one which involves collaborative efforts of professionals, community members, and parents. By bringing together this network of stakeholders, the needs of the youth and community are met in a new and significant organizational environment (Tymchak, 2001). School^{PLUS} represents a type of public education which engages family, students, educators, and community members to actively work together with public services and provide Saskatchewan youth with educative, social, emotional, and physical needs. Saskatchewan Learning (n.d. a) further explains School^{PLUS}:

School^{PLUS} invites schools to maximize the learning potential of all children and youth, by expanding their engagement of the community in a reciprocal relationship of sharing and support. This will enable schools and communities to

benefit from an exchange of services and programs and create opportunities to partner to meet common goals. (para. 1)

Today more than ever, School^{PLUS} recognizes the importance of close school-community relations. Saskatchewan schools today need to serve two primary functions: to educate children (intellectually, socially, emotionally, spiritually, and physically) and to support service delivery (community-level centers which deliver social, health, recreation, culture, justice, and other family services) (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). School^{PLUS} also recognizes that “parental involvement and public support is essential for school success” (Fullan, 2003, p. 43).

School^{PLUS} was based on the idea of Community Schools. Community Schools in Saskatchewan are considered educational facilities open beyond the traditional school day for the purpose of providing academic, recreation, health, social services, and work preparation for community citizens of all ages (Jordan, 1999). To provide these services, families and community members often serve as school volunteers, school aids, and resource references. Dryfoos (2000), a strong advocate of community schools, believed community schools bring together the concept of mind, body, and building into an integrated approach of quality education. The mind is addressed through academic classes offered both to students and adult members of the community. The body is addressed through on-site primary health services such as immunizations and dentistry. Counselors are available for students and community members, and trained health educators teach social and behavioral skills to students and community members. The school building, as a resource for the community, is also an important component of community schools. The school hosts such things as preschool and before- and after-

school child care. In addition, the school often supports a breakfast program, a lunch program, and an after-school snack program. The school invites the community to make use of the school auditorium and/or school property, and community health-care facilities are present within the school. “The community ‘owns’ the school” (Dryfoos, 2000, p. 16).

Community Schools mirror the importance of cooperation and collaboration between local community interests and public education. In *School^{PLUS}: A Vision for Children and Youth*, Tymchak (2001) recommended that a “community school philosophy be adopted for all public schools in the province” (p. 47). School^{PLUS} suggests that all schools should be centers of the community; school facilities need to become a key community resource. In turn, community resources will support student success (Government of Saskatchewan, 2002).

The ideas associated with School^{PLUS} are not limited to the schools and communities within our province. Rather, these ideas are becoming increasingly popular both nationally and internationally. The Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (2002) stipulated that provincial and territorial ministers must commit to strengthening partnerships with students, educational institutions, businesses, individuals, community organizations, and parents in an effort to address the complexities of learning. Dryfoos (1999) stated that more and more American schools are responding to societal changes and needs by developing such school-related programs as on-site child care, tutoring opportunities for students and adults, and community recreational activities.

From a theoretical perspective, School^{PLUS} is a response to the school reform movement that has characterized education for the past twenty years or more (Noonan,

2004). School^{PLUS} is, in fact, a vehicle which is being used within Saskatchewan to drive this school reform. Fullan (2003), a leading scholar on school reform, believed that to initiate and sustain successful school reform, changes need to occur at the school level, district level, and state level. Fullan further explained that at the school level, educators “need to reach out and become more responsive to parent involvement and community development” (Fullan, 2003, p. 44). At a district and state level, integrated health, social, and justice services, pre-school programs, and urban and rural economic development can be connected to schools through local and regional partnerships. Many of Fullan’s ideas of school reform and many of the ideas represented through School^{PLUS} are in close alignment. Both ideologies represent a reformation of schools in relation to community and state efforts and agencies.

Participants’ Stories

All participants recognized how school-community relationships shaped the culture of the school, the flavour of the curriculum, and the instructional methods they utilized, whether the school was in a rural or urban setting. Paula advised any new teacher, whether rural or urban, to seek out a support network, ask teachers about the community, and get involved with activities both inside and outside the school. Participants recognized that the culture of the school was really a reflection of its community. Jenny believed that “*every community prepares its kids for the culture that it has or what is needed to have as a continued member of that community*”. Participants recognized that it is important for the teacher to take into account the individual interests needs of each student. Joseph talked about some of his students who were strong in

math. *“They had taken the opportunity to study Calculus by televised instruction out of Regina.”*

It was interesting to note that participants also recognized some of the negative effects of living in a small community. For example, Benjamin paraphrased the way some of his students viewed education. *“I can stay right here in [the rural town] where I grew up, work in the mine...work on the family farm, get my own land, and I don’t need to go to school for that.”* Hannah described how going against the norm of a community can be painful for students. *“[Students often] experience more bullying in the rural school. In the rural community, if you don’t look normal to another kid or you don’t act normal or you can’t learn like another child can, others can pick that out.”*

Although no participants specifically referred to the term “School^{PLUS}”, the ideas of School^{PLUS} echoed throughout their teaching stories in both rural and urban schools. Participants talked about integrated services which were sponsored by the school. Participants also talked about how they actively engaged in creating and endorsing school and community relationships. Their examples illustrated how School^{PLUS} involves “a host of community collaborations including government, nongovernment, parent, neighborhood, and professional partnerships that [come] together in unique, purposeful ways” (Salm, 2004, p. 18).

Jenny talked about a community breakfast program sponsored by rural school. Heidi’s advice to a new teacher in either a rural or urban community was to have a potluck at the school with community members. Heidi spoke about she involved and invited the community to school-sponsored cultural events, music festivals, spelling bees, and athletic competitions. She also described how she integrated the school and

community when she hung of her students' art in the local Credit Union. Elaine talked about the community field trips she organized for her students both in the rural and urban settings. Hannah spoke about how the urban community was involved with fund-raising event and donated money for playground equipment. She also talked about how she integrated her health unit with urban community resources by having her students do crafts and perform music with seniors at a local healthcare facility. Paula and Benjamin were appreciative of the amount of assistance they received from volunteering parents and community members both within the rural and urban schools. Joseph explained that by having close parental ties, problems within rural or urban schools could more easily be worked out.

These references are only a few of the many examples given by the participants which reflect how a symbiosis of school-community was a prominent and important part of their teaching, whether in rural or urban settings.

Experience and Identity: Teaching Lives in Rural and Urban Contexts

We are who we are because of the experiences we have had.

James P. Gee, 2000/2001

Gee (2000/2001) defined "identity" as "a certain 'kind of person' in a given context" (p. 99). Based on this definition, all people have multiple identities which are connected to their performances in society. For example, a woman can be identified as a mother, a coach, and a CEO. Identities are tied to historical, sociocultural, and institutional forces. In addition, a sense of identity is formed and reformed over a lifetime within individual contexts and through interactions within society. Each of us has a "core identity" which reflects his or her basic character; however, even this core identity is always changing (Gee, 2000/2001).

Butt et al. (1992) recognized that prior to the 1990s, little research credit had been given to how past experience and the development of teacher identity affect the way a teacher thinks and acts in the classroom. Typically teachers have been viewed as vehicles of knowledge; knowledge which is presented through curricula, teaching approaches, and school policies. “To assume that a teacher could somehow be cut free of her history and approach each situation without benefit of past experience would be absurd” (Clandinin, 1986, p. 3). Connelly and Clandinin (1999) described “personal and practical knowledge” as part of the teacher’s past experience, part of the teacher’s present frame of mind, and relevant to the teacher’s future plans and actions. A teacher’s personal and practical knowledge is a “landscape” of his or her teacher identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). That is to say, a teacher’s experience shapes his or her identity.

Gee (2000/2001) claimed that “affinity groups” are an important aspect of identity. People of an affinity group must share an “allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the group’s members to requisite experiences” (p. 105). Distinctive social practices create and sustain group affiliations. Studying one’s life history, social practices, and the affinity groups to which one belongs provides insight into identity.

Social-constructivism is associated with identities defined through affinity groups. Social-constructivism describes the way people learn and make meaning out of experience. This theoretical approach emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and in constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Derry, 1999). Social-constructivists believe that from a shared experience, an individual will derive meaning. The making of this meaning depends on

the person's prior social and cultural environment. Fullan (2003) stated, "Social interaction converts information into knowledge" (p. 47).

Vygotsky believed that an individual's development cannot be understood without considering the history of the social group of which the individual was a member and considering the social events in which the individual interacted (Wells, 2000). The Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), as articulated by Wells (2002), is a social constructivist perspective based on the work of Vygotsky. CHAT has also been influenced by the work of scholars such as Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wells (1999). From the perspective of CHAT, cognition is shaped by the "settings" in which learners participate and the activities that take place in those settings. As Lave and Wenger (1991) have explained "settings" refers to the people and events that have social and historical meaning. This explains why two people in a room are not "identically situated" (Brown & Duguid, 1996, p. 53, as cited in Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005). Their histories and the interaction of their histories with other elements of a setting may be drastically different. Thus, the way to effectively teach mathematics to a farm boy from the prairies and a Chinese girl from the city will vary greatly. The individual's learning depends not only on the nature and quality of assistance provided but also on his or her learning dispositions and past experiences (Wells, 2002).

The view of learning and knowledge as situated in activity and yet influenced by a participant's history (Adams et al., 2005; Gee, 2000/2001) has important implications for understanding the experiences of teachers placed in rural and urban settings. Within this study, positive and negative experiences of rural and urban teaching are at least somewhat dependent upon prior levels of social understanding and skills relative to rural

and urban cultures. That is, rural and urban teaching experiences were directly affected and reflective of previous rural and urban cultural experiences, both personally and professionally. This implies that rural-raised teachers may be disadvantaged when teaching in an urban school, and urban-raised teachers may be disadvantaged when teaching in a rural school. For example, imagine the following: “a rural-raised teacher discusses the specifics of local gang colors with inner-city students” and “an urban-raised teacher discusses the negative ramifications of Foot and Mouth disease with a community farmer”. In these examples, it would probably be a less difficult situation if the teachers exchanged locales.

Keeping the above in mind, CHAT is also associated with professional apprenticeships. Apprenticeships come in a variety of fashions such as mentoring programs, cooperative programs, internship, and practicums (Booker, 2003). Although these apprenticeships are important in neophyte stages of professional and academic development, there is a need to recognize there exists a type of “pre-apprenticeship” or “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, as cited by Hasinoff & Mandzuk, 2005, p.233) or “semiotic apprenticeship” (Wells, 1999) before an actual apprenticeship experience occurs. This is especially true for students who aspire to be teachers. Wells (1999) insisted that a student has already undergone a kind of semiotic or accidental apprenticeship simply through the hours spent in a classroom environment “observing” his or her teacher. Teachers sometimes fall back on the familiarity of their experience as students when choosing instructional practices. Researchers have restated this idea in many ways. People come to see themselves as a portfolio of their experiences and achievements gained through experiences inside and outside of school (Howe & Strauss,

as cited by Gee, 2000/2001). Goodson (1992) said, “It is clear that the teachers’ previous *life experience and background* [original italics] help shape their view of teaching and are essential elements in their practice” (p. 243). This type of “situated learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) infers that much about the realities of teaching have already been experienced and learned by new teachers through previous and cultural experiences.

Based on the above philosophies, the cultural and social background of a teacher affects the way a teacher acts and handles various situations. This is not to say that rural-raised teachers cannot effectively teach in urban schools and an urban-raised teacher cannot effectively teach in rural schools. If one’s background played such an unrelenting role, the many successful foreign-teacher exchanges which take place worldwide, would not be possible. Instead, what is true is foreign teachers are often placed in personally unrelated cultures and communities. These teachers learn about the new culture, adapt to the new culture, and are still able to teach effectively. As Brown et al. (1989) stated, knowledge will “continually evolve with each new occasion of use, because new situations, negotiations, and activities inevitably recast it in a new, more densely textured form” (p. 33). Or as Rogoff and Lave (1999) explained: “In order to function, people must be able to generalize some aspects of knowledge and skill to new situations” (p. 3). However, the social and cultural history of a teacher will have *some* effect on the successes and challenges associated with the teaching job, especially for neophyte teachers.

Participants’ Histories

The rural and urban backgrounds of the participants had an effect on their teaching experience. To help explain this, we will revisit the participants’ biographies,

specifically look at whether the participant was “rural raised” (RR) or “urban raised” (UR), and explain how this had an effect on their teaching experience.

In this study, Benjamin (UR) and Jenny (UR) accepted their first teaching jobs in rural schools. In both of these situations, the participants talked about their new job and their new community. Benjamin notes, *“I really didn’t enjoy being out in [the rural community]. It was a little too far from [the city] for my first job.”* Jenny comments, *“It was a community where everything was the same always. So it was a difficult place to be. Not that many good things didn’t come out of it...but it was difficult.”* For both Benjamin and Jenny these comments were part of their first year of teaching. Their frustrations could have been associated with the change in environment (an UR person teaching in a rural community) and with the hardships associated with first-year teaching.

Hannah (RR) accepted her first job in an urban school. Hannah was somewhat unaccustomed to lack of socialization within the urban profession. *“They were very welcoming and very nice, but to lend that extra hand, like to get together for supper outside school hours because I knew nobody in the city, it really didn’t happen a whole lot.”* Compare this to how Joseph (RR) described his welcoming into a rural community: *“The other thing, too, that I remember that first year is the many parents who invited me into their homes just for an evening of socializing or just getting to know them as people.”*

After many years of teaching in a rural school, Joseph (RR) experienced his first job in an urban school. He was surprised by what he encountered. He said, *“The thing I noticed about teaching in a larger school... it was the first time that I was able to work in a setting where there were enough teachers that we could have a subject-area team.”*

Joseph (RR) valued this specialized collaboration; he was not accustomed to this width of subject knowledge in his rural experiences. He also goes on to explain that as an urban administrator, he had to get used to a more formal manner of communication and decision-making: *“It’s more difficult, although not impossible, to engage in a collaborative model with 50 people than it is with eight people. So there tends to be a more formal manner of communicating and decision-making in a larger school setting.”*

After having taught for a few years in both rural and urban schools, Paula (RR) described one of her next urban teaching experiences by saying, *“Almost everybody lives in a house worth \$300,000...There is a whole different perspective with upper or middle class.”* She continued by saying, *“The community was a little bit...well, coming from a small town maybe my opinion is a bit skewed, (laugh) but I found some of the people there to be...ah...totally snobby! Like let’s get down to earth, here (laugh).”*

In all of these examples, the social and cultural background of each teacher was associated with the experience they had while teaching in rural and urban schools. For UR participants teaching in rural settings and for RR participants teaching in urban settings part of the frustration they experienced could have been due to the fact that they didn’t always recognize they were in a new subculture. For example, an urban dweller can easily move into the country without having to learn a new language, exchange currency, or buy a more culturally-suitable wardrobe. The same holds true for rural dwellers moving into the city. On the surface, the changing of rural and urban lifestyles seems to be an easy transition. However, rural and urban settings do have their own “culture” which needs to be experienced and learned before people can become comfortable with the change.

Coach and Confidant: The Many Roles of the Teacher

The more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be!

Parker J. Palmer, 1998

Another major theme of the study describes the responsibilities associated with the teaching profession. One readily associates teaching with a stereotypical snapshot depicting the teacher and students engaged in classroom activities. However, there is much more to the profession than the specifics of classroom instruction and student inquiry. Education is a highly moral as well as practical endeavor (McKernan, 1996). A teacher must care about the development of students academically, socially, personally, emotionally, and vocationally, as well as safeguard students' health and well-being.

To become a teacher is to serve students, the school, the community, and the state in a professional manner (Parkay et al., 2005). "[Teachers] become living examples for their students, showing that what they say is important enough for them to apply to their own lives. They are attractive models who advertise, by their very being, that learning does produce wisdom" (Kottler & Zehm, 2000, p. 19). As Dewey believed, teachers and their actions make significant contributions to the community at large (O'Quinn & Garrison, 2006), because teachers guide the students who will, in turn, create empowered communities.

Teachers have a gamut of responsibilities including involvement in extra curricular activities, supervision, tutoring and counseling, professional development, staff meetings, parent-teaching meetings, committee meetings, school and community events, community board memberships, record keeping, and after-school planning and preparing for classroom activities. "Over 90 percent of teachers work more than 40 hours per week, with the largest percentage working more than 55 hours per week" (Louis Harris

and Associates, as cited by Parkay et al., 2005, p. 20). While many of these out-of-class functions are not directly instructional, they are an important aspect of the student's life. For example, when a teacher volunteers to coach extra curricular activities, students benefit socially and physically. From this study, it is apparent that teachers take on many roles: educator, counselor, social worker, consultant, coach, role model, and active community member, just to name a few. Taking on these roles means that teachers become an integral part of their students' lives in many ways, and, therefore, teachers are often very influential for many students.

Teacher Roles of Participants

The participants of this study were highly involved with the "peripherals" of teaching. When describing a typical day, all teachers spoke of a harmonious pandemonium of activities from the start to the finish of their day. All teachers participated in various school-related activities well into their evenings. In most cases, finding time to sit down and eat lunch was often difficult. Benjamin commented that every day of the week involved some type of supervision. Elaine spoke about the vast amount of after-school time she put into her teaching. *"Any resources that I had, I made myself. I remember staying up until midnight all the time to work on teaching plans."* In all stories, teaching and its peripherals consumed large portions of the participant's life: Joseph talks about his community involvement outside of school: *I would often stay to coach, or I would often stay for various evening activities."* Heidi described what it takes to be a teacher. *"To be a teacher you needed to be very innovative. You needed to be very creative. It wasn't hard if you were always thinking your work - all the time!"* Jenny explained that she regarded professional development very highly and was

constantly involved in PD committees, sponsoring interns, and attending and presenting at conferences and workshops. Paula talked about her extracurricular involvement in school. *“I remember coaching and helping out in volleyball. I also played a major part in coaching basketball. There were a lot of extra demands, that’s for sure.”* Hannah talked about one of her favourite teaching memories. Ironically, it had little to do with what she was teaching in her classroom:

She was only in grade three, so very scared and didn’t quite know what was going on. My principal at the time had given me permission to spend some time after supper with her, if it was okay with the grandparents... So I had a chance to take her out for supper. As well, she had no clothes, so I went to Wal-Mart and bought her an outfit, some socks and underwear, and all those kinds of necessities. So it was a really good evening and any time she found me, there was that little sparkle in her eyes, because I suppose I had kind of saved her.

Within all these examples, there is an apparent acceptance of the personal impact of extra teaching responsibilities. Simply stated, the participants’ jobs seeped into their private life, their family time, and their personal space. Perhaps greater recognition and inclusion of this fact should be incorporated into basic teacher education.

My Story

Just like the participants of this study, I, too, have taught in both rural and urban schools. My first teaching job involved teaching in a small community, and being raised on a farm helped me be more prepared and successful during this first year of teaching. For me, the transition from rural to urban schools was drastic as it involved moving out of Canada and learning about new cultures, languages, and lifestyles. However, in both

rural and urban scenarios, the importance of close school-community relationships was obvious. As well, my cultural background and my previous teaching experience affected how I taught. My story reflects the many roles and responsibilities that are an integral part of the teaching profession.

My Rural Teaching Experiences

Having grown up on a farm near a small town, the idea of being connected to one's neighbor for mutually beneficial reasons was natural. Therefore, when I was placed in a rural community during my internship and when I accepted my first full-time teaching job in a rural community, I made sure I connected to the school and community as quickly as possible. I knew that in order to be a successful impressive teacher, I needed to use my talents and skills for the benefit of the entire community. This was not something that was told to me. This social covenant was part of my hereditary build.

In my rural experiences, I began my teaching journey utilizing my eyes and my ears. I watched and listen to the harmony and disharmony of the community. What I was looking for was, as Servioganni (2000) noted, a common sense of identity or a pride of common place. After identifying the "flavour" of the community, I committed myself to be active both within the school and community. In order to be success in the classroom, I had to be accepted by the community. The only way to be accepted by the community was to be seen as being an active part of the community.

My personal interests and skills have always been in the areas of music, spirituality, sports, and cooking and baking. One area where the community and I held common beliefs was in the area of religion. Therefore, during my internship, I joined the local church choir. I volunteered to teach Christian ethics in the school. I conducted the

Christmas concert choir. As well, I participated in community volleyball and curling events. I went on community horse-back treks, and continually talked and visited with parents and members of the community at any chance I had. I provided cakes and cookies for community bake sales, and I frequented community events such as Sports Days or rodeo events.

In the other rural community, I attended Powwows, went on camping trips, took weekend walks along the river in search of mint tea, participated in spiritual healing events, taught community dance lessons twice a week, invited friends and community members into my home for visits and meals, went to community weddings and get-togethers, and often conducted my classes outdoors utilizing the benefits of nature. Within all these examples, the social capital of the community, for the most part, was in line with my personal beliefs. Therefore, my acceptance into the community was a natural progression.

I ensured that my teaching involved the community. I organized a major field trip for the entire school body and welcomed community members. I utilized community events within my classroom in the forms of discussions and various class activities and assignments. By doing so, I exemplified a respect and commitment to the culture of the community. I recognized that being a partner with the school and community was mandatory to the growth and development of my students and me.

Before actually having teaching experience, my preconceived notion of teaching was basically that the teacher was placed in a classroom to teach students curriculum content. Reflecting on those first years of teaching, I can easily see how I fulfilled more roles than just a “disseminator of knowledge”. I remember the tears and emotional grief

of my entire class as one student described the sexual abuse she had been enduring. I remember the wave of excitement on the bus as the students saw the Rocky Mountains for the first time. I remember the pride of my class after having performed drama and dance in front of their parents. During these times, I was much more than a teacher. I was a counselor, companion, and role model.

My Urban Teaching Experiences

My success in the urban schools was also directly attributed to the school-community connections that I created. In fact, strong school-community relations were even more important for me as an urban teacher because the urban schools in which I taught were in an overseas environment. I knew from my prior teaching and personal experiences, before I could connect with my students on an academic level, I needed to connect with them on a social level. Because I knew very little about these foreign environments, I so desperately needed to become active within these urban communities.

My quest to exemplify and utilize community beliefs and customs within my classroom started even before I left my home country. I read extensively on the new culture and its language. As well, I researched the country's educational system. Upon arriving in the new environment, I watched and listened to my surroundings. I needed to be aware of simple things such as dress, climate, food, and social mannerisms. Also, I tried to form a close connection with at least one person from the community. I needed a mentor; someone who personified the community's shared ideas, norms, and beliefs. I also needed a close connection with the parents of the students I was to teach. I knew I would probably not have opportunities to participate in impromptu meetings with parents while walking down the main street of the city. Metropolitan centers are too large for

such coincidences. However, there were other ways I built strong connections with urban parents. I started by introducing myself through a friendly letter, which I sent home to parents early in September. Thereafter, students were provided with monthly letters to parents explaining and celebrating student achievements. Also early in September and periodically throughout the year, my class and I hosted “Parents Welcome Days”. (I remember the tentative approval given to me by my principal when I asked her if I could host these days. She was concerned that hosting such days might set “a precedent” for teachers in other classrooms. I disguised my real purpose for the “Parent Welcome Days” by saying my class and I were a special case. I taught the ESL students in the school, and thus, more teacher-parent-student connect was necessary.)

I connected student learning with the community in other ways. I took students on field trips. In fact, I ended up writing a field trip book entitled “Out & About: 120 Kuwaiti Field Trips”. This book has since been mass-copied and now serves as a national resource for foreign and local Arab teachers in Kuwait. The book also addressed various national and international help organizations and volunteer groups with which students can become involved.

Additionally, I organized a student-parent-teacher overseas field trip to Egypt. Other core teachers and I utilized this opportunity to create integrated curriculum units. I also participated in and volunteered for other small, but pertinent, school-community events including PTA meetings, music festivals, sports events, community carnivals, bake sales, drama events, and youth dances.

By the time I taught in urban schools, I easily realized that teaching was more than curricula. Successful teaching was determined by the ability to reach the whole

child, academically and socially. Therefore, I volunteered to coach extra curricular activities. I specifically put time aside at the end of the day so that students had an opportunity to talk to me about personal matters. I gave my home phone number and email address to students, letting them know that I was there if needed. (At present, past students still contact me for advice and to discuss their successes and problems). Teaching is so much more than being a classroom educator. Being a teacher involves being identified as everything from coach to confidant.

Summary

This study reveals the experiences of teachers who have taught in both rural and urban schools. Not only does analyzing the data uncover specifics about rural and urban education, analyzing the data highlights broader ideas about teaching and education. These ideas describe the importance of school and community relationships, describe how experience and identity are related, and reflect the many roles and responsibilities of a teacher. My personal rural and urban teaching experiences exemplify these conclusions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, the research question is answered, and implications and future research based on this study are described. A personal reflection regarding the overall success of the study concludes the thesis.

Answering the Research Question

The following research question guided this study: “What are the experiences and perspectives of teachers with respect to teaching in rural and urban environments?”

Although each participant taught in both rural and urban schools, no participants formally verbalized a preference for either rural or urban; participants simply stated their experiences were different. In rural schools, participants talked about closer school-community relations. To be a rural teacher was to be a part of a family community. The rural environment is a place where everyone knows everyone. Because of these close relationships, rural teachers were readily able to identify with the background of students, and parents were more involved with the school. As well, administration was more active in the life of the teacher, and individual teachers were more influential upon the lives of students. One of the difficulties associated with teaching within a rural school was that teachers lacked privacy within their personal lives. Also, participants spoke about high expectations which were placed upon them, especially in the area of extra curricular activities and supervision.

The experience and perspectives of an urban teacher were directly related to the larger school enrollments. As urban teachers, participants often taught in a culturally diverse classroom, and felt a greater sense of teaching autonomy. Administration was less active in the lives of the teachers. Professional development was more accessible, and professional collaboration or professional committee memberships were more encompassing and active in urban communities. Urban teaching involved opportunities of location, as well. For example, there was a greater variety of community field trips available in the urban centers. The downside to the urban teaching experience was, in general, that student-teacher relationships were more formal, and classroom management, in general, is more difficult. The urban teacher is one person in a large school community, and, therefore, less able to make an identifiable and influential mark within the school community.

Recommendations

In this qualitative study, several implications have emerged pertinent to “the community and school” and “teaching responsibilities”. They are described below.

1. It is essential for all teachers to take into account the “whole child” when stepping into the classroom – physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually (Renck-Jalongo, 1991; Saskatchewan Learning, n.d. b). In order to effectively do this, teachers must have a good understanding of the culture of the extended school community (Asselin, 2001; Taylor, D., 1993).
2. In any unfamiliar teaching environments, teachers must take time, before entering the school, to examine personal fundamental values, attitudes, dispositions, and belief systems which create their identity (Abt-Perkins &

Gomez, 1993). In addition, they must understand how their identity and past experience will influence their teaching.

3. Teachers must also be attentive to beliefs, norms, and practices of the communities in which they teach. There needs to be linkage between the school and the broader community purposes; a way of grounding curriculum and instruction in the civic and economic life of a community (Howley & Howley, 2003).
4. Relationship is at the heart of teaching (Clandinin, 1986; Cummins, as cited by Tolley, 2003), and relationships are key in building a sense of community both inside and outside the school. The commitment for education to involve both school and community, as outlined by School^{PLUS} efforts is an exemplary way to offer quality education by focusing on positive relationships.
5. A teacher's prior experiences and "accidental apprenticeship" (as a student in pre-kindergarten-to-college classrooms) affects his or her classroom practices as a teacher. By not accommodating the biographical and in-school experiences of teacher candidates in teacher preparation programs and by not allowing teachers to reflect on these experiences, beginning teachers are bound to become teachers who teach in a manner they were taught (Knowles, 1992). Teacher preparation programs need to harness the life experiences of teacher candidates into their courses.
6. Although pre-service education cannot completely prepare teachers specifically for rural or urban communities, in it lies opportunities for rural and urban experience and mentorship. For example, to broaden experience,

whenever possible, a rural-raised teacher candidate could ask for internship placement in an urban classroom, and an urban-raised teacher candidate could seek for intern placement in a rural classroom.

7. Mentoring should be practiced when a new teacher becomes part of a new school community. Often new teachers are simply provided with a tour and an impromptu discussion about the needs and welfare of the school and its community. Mentoring practices should be put in place in all schools such that a veteran teacher who understands the school's curriculum needs, staff dynamics, and community culture should be there to support new teachers (Booker, 2003).
8. Teachers have extremely busy lives. So many teachers put their lives into their profession, working long hours above and beyond the call of duty. The overarching responsibilities of being a teacher should be recognized at an early stage in teacher educational programs (Parkay et al., 2005).

Suggestion for Future Research

This study describes the differences between rural and urban education as experienced by teachers who have taught in both settings. These findings suggest additional avenues for future research.

1. This study reflected some rural and urban school-based teacher experiences in Alberta and Saskatchewan. As identified earlier, the definition of “rural” and “urban” vary according to region. For example, what constitutes urban living in Saskatchewan would not necessarily equate to an urban-lifestyle in eastern Canada or England. It would be interesting to do this same study with

participants from other national and international rural and urban settings.

Specifically, how do rural and urban experiences based on Saskatchewan and Alberta compare to other national and international rural and urban experiences?

2. The relationship between the school and the community was an integral part of this study, and participants talked about expectations that were placed on them by the school and community. Further research could be done within this area answering such questions as: What are the expectations of teachers from a community perspective? From a student perspective? From a parental perspective?
3. A description of the teacher's relationship with administration was a part of each participant's story. It would be interesting to do research which deals with what constitutes an effective professional relationship between teachers and administrators from a teacher's perspective and from an administrator's perspective? Also within the topic of administration, it would be interesting compare rural and urban administrative practices. How do they compare? How do they differ?
4. The participants of this research described how they were better able to individualize their instruction when they taught within rural schools. How does individualizing instruction affect students? More specifically, how does individualized instruction affect at-risk students?
5. This study exemplified some of the frustrations found in teaching and further research could be done in this area. Does teacher frustration stem from

cultural and social differences found between teacher and student? Does this frustration stem from community pressures? Why do teachers quit the teaching profession? Are the reasons similar for teachers in rural and urban schools?

6. A minor point raised in this study described the difficulty that some rural students have when they move to cities for post-secondary education. A suggestion for further research would involve the personal narratives of rural students. What was it like transferring from a rural high school to an urban post-secondary institute? What was the most difficult aspect of the transition? What aspects of urban life and post-secondary education did rural students enjoy the most?

Reflection

“I’ve come to know there’s life on both ends of that red dirt road.”

Brooks & Dunn, 2003

Perhaps one of the most important components of this thesis lies in this final reflection. From the writing of this thesis, I’ve come to recognize hidden “monsters under my bed”. Although I identified some of my rural biases at the beginning of the study, I didn’t realize until the end of my study the extent of these biases. Although I enjoyed many aspects of being raised on the farm, I always thought that I had been cheated academically because I went to a rural school. One might even say I felt bitter, because being raised “rural” put me at a disadvantage academically and professionally. Because I was a “farm girl” I always felt less sophisticated and somewhat inferior to my university friends and teaching colleagues simply because I grew up having drunk frothy milk from our Holstein cows and not the chocolate milk poured from a wax carton.

I see now, there is no need for this personal prejudice. From this study, I have come to realize the full potential of my rural background. My rural background has contributed to my success as a mother, wife, teacher, and community member. This background has provided me with invaluable treasures such as communal spirit and support, awareness and concern for others, a love for nature and gardening, and a closeness to family, relatives, and friends.

Also from this study, I have recognized the importance of my urban living and teaching experiences and have become profoundly grateful for them. Opportunities within urban communities have quenched my thirst for travel, academic achievement, and religious and cultural understanding. Participating in urban teaching and living has given me global awareness, a greater concern and care for the environment, an interest in politics, an interest in cultural diversity, and a love for the fine arts. Because of these experiences, I am a better mother, wife, teacher, and community member.

What I now see clearly is: *There is no rivalry between rural and urban, but there are differences. In their uniqueness, there is celebration; a celebration of diversity and an opportunity to learn.*

In this, my final paragraph, I want to thank the participants of this study for teaching me these lessons. Through their stories, I was informally allowed to observe them within their schools and their communities. Listening and watching them from this perspective was a very safe and secure place for me to reflect, and grow. My final words are “thank-you” to them. For without them, this academic and personal journey would not have gotten through the screen door!

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Invitation for Participants

Dear Participant:

It is through this letter that I invite you to be part of my thesis research which will enable me to complete the requirements for a Masters of Education degree in Curriculum Studies, University of Saskatchewan.

I am basing my research on your personal stories. By participating in this study, you will be asked to discuss various aspects of your teaching experience both in rural and urban schools. I am genuinely excited to be given the opportunity to listen to the experiences you have to share on this topic.

It is my intention to interview you twice. Each interview will last approximately one hour and each interview will be taped. The interviews are intended to be relaxed in nature, and although structured questions will be formulated ahead of time, the interviews will be much like a conversation. The interview will take place at a time and place of your convenience. The location of the interview should be comfortable for you, while also conducive to dialogue.

After the interviews are completed, tapes will be transcribed by a professional, third party. The information provided in the interview as well as your identity will remain confidential. This means that pseudonyms will be used whenever you or the information you provide is referred to. After my research is completed, you will be given the opportunity to review it for accuracy and make changes and/or deletions before it is printed.

Once the thesis is printed, the document will be available as a resource in the following two centers: The Education Library, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan and in the Stewart Resource Center, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. In addition, information from this research may be used within various conferences and presentations.

It is my pleasure to include your personal experiences and perspectives as an active component of my research. I look forward to our conversations.

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Appendix B: Interview #1 Questions

I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The interview should last about one hour. In general, we will be talking about your experiences while teaching in various rural and urban schools.

1. To start with, let's talk about yourself and where you grew up. Please describe the community in which you were raised.
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
3. Think about your first year of teaching. What was that first year like?
4. Now I would like you to tell me about the other schools in which you taught. For example, what were the enrolments of the schools? What grades were offered within the schools? What subject and grade areas did you teach? Etc.
5. Please describe the communities of the schools in which you taught.
6. How did the communities interact within the schools? Can you give me some examples?
7. How did your teaching change based on the school's environment?
8. Now I would like to talk about the school administration. Describe the overall effectiveness and organization of the administration within the schools you have taught.
9. Having an abundance of resources is always an ideal component of teaching. Describe the amount and type of resources that were available to you within the schools you have taught.

Appendix C: Interview #2 Questions

It's great to see you again. Thanks for taking the time to participate in a second interview. Today we will be basically continuing from what we talked about in the first interview. In our first interview, we talked about your personal background, interest in teaching, and your teaching experiences within (name of schools). I am interested in this interview to learn more about your experiences within these schools.

1. Let's start by focusing on (name one school). Take me through a typical day in the life of (name of person) at one of the schools in which you taught. Please identify such things as type of classes you taught and any supervision or extra-curricular activities you were involved in.
2. How does this description of "a day in the life of (name of person) at (name of school)" compare to days you had in other schools?
3. Describe your professional development journey? What supported this journey? Were there barriers? If so, what were they?
4. How did you feel during your first year teaching at a new school? What factors made your transition into a new school environment easier or harder?
5. (If a high school teacher) After the students left high school, how well were they prepared for their future? In your opinion, what was their transition from high school into adult life like?
6. Tell me about a time when you most enjoyed teaching? What factors played a part in your success?
7. What was one or two of your most frustrating teaching times? What factors played a part in your frustration?
8. I am going to summarize our interviews with the next few questions. In your opinion, are there any recognizable differences between rural and urban students? If so, what are they?
9. In your opinion, are there any recognizable differences between teaching in rural and urban environments (for example, classroom management, administration, extra-curricular activities, resources, special needs programs, etc)?
10. What advice would you give to a teacher employed by a rural school for the first time? How would this advice differ from what you would say to a teacher employed by an urban school for the first time?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add about your teaching experience in any of the schools?

Appendix D: Letter of Consent

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “**Rural and Urban Teaching Experiences**”. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Supervisor/Contact information

Dr. Angela Ward

Mailing Address: Department of Curriculum Studies
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, SK, S7N 0X1

Phone: (306) 966-7585 (office)

Researcher/Contact information

Jane Preston

Mailing address: RR5, Site 512, Box 8, Saskatoon, SK, S7K 3J8

Phone: (306) 652-6777 (hm) or (306) 966-7571 (wk)

Email: jane37@hotmail.com

Purpose and Procedure

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify and describe commonalities and differences within rural and urban education as experienced by teachers. This will be accomplished by interviewing teacher participants who have both rural and urban teaching experiences and by listening to and documenting their experiences and understandings of the rural and urban schools in which they taught. Each participant will be involved in two interviews of approximately one and a half hours in length. Each interview will be scheduled and located at a time and place that is convenient for the participant and conducive to confidentiality.

When distance to participant is an issue, interviews may be conducted over the phone. In these cases, the researcher will utilize a phone speaker within her home. A tape recorder will be placed next to the phone speaker to tape the telephone conversation. For reasons of anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher will ensure that during these telephone conversations, no one, except the researcher, will be present within her home.

Based on the dynamics of the first two interviews and participant desire, an additional third interview may be scheduled. This third interview would be used to seek further depth into issues and/or topics addressed within the initial two interviews and/or for the clarification of data collected during the first two interviews. The length of the third interview would be no longer than one and a half hours.

Potential Risks

There are no known risks.

Potential Benefits

The researcher hopes to gain a deeper understanding of specific commonalities and differences within rural and urban education.

Storage of Data

Throughout the interview process and study period, the researcher will keep all tapes and transcripts in a safe and secure place. Following the completion of this study, research materials including all tape recordings, interview transcripts, and field notes will be safeguarded for a period of five years at the University of Saskatchewan under the care of my thesis supervisor, Dr. Angela Ward, in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines. After five years, the tape recordings, interview transcripts, and field notes will be destroyed.

Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured as far as possible for all participants. Pseudonyms will be given to the names of the teachers and the schools they identified. As well, the researcher will make specific details more generic or entirely omit specific details which could indicate the identity of the participant. Moreover, the consent forms will be stored separately from the data collected, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses.

Reviewing Transcripts

After an interview, and prior to data being included in the final report, the participant will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcript as the participant sees fit.

Debriefing and Feedback

The results of this study will be published in a thesis and may also be used for publications in academic journals and for conferences and presentations. Copies of the finished thesis will be made available in the Education Library, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, the Curriculum Studies Office, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, and in the Stewart Resource Center, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. Each participant will receive a summary of the research findings (Chapter 5 of the thesis) at the end of the study. As well, each participant will receive a copy of the thesis, if he/she so wishes.

Right to Withdrawal

Participation within this study is voluntary, and the participant may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time without penalty of any sort or without loss of services at the University of Saskatchewan. If the participant withdraws from the study at any time, any data that he/she has contributed will be destroyed at his/her request.

Questions

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the number provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on

_____. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Consent to Participate

I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix E: Transcripts Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the completed transcripts of my interview with Jane Preston in this study. As well, I have read, understand, and agree to the following points.

- 1) I have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcripts as I see appropriate.
- 2) I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects the content of my person interview with Jane Preston.
- 3) I authorize the release of this transcript to Jane Preston to be used in a manner described in her consent form.
- 4) I have received a copy of this Transcripts Release Form for my own records.

Date

Participant

Date

Researcher

Appendix F: Ethics Approval



University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

24-Feb-2006

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Angela Ward

DEPARTMENT
Curriculum Studies

BEH#
Beh 06-23

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S)
Jane Preston

INSTITUTION (S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon SK

SPONSORING AGENCIES
UNFUNDED

TITLE
Rural and Urban Teaching Experiences

CURRENT APPROVAL DATE
24-Feb-2006

CURRENT RENEWAL DATE
01-Feb-2006

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

The term of this approval is five years. However, the approval must be renewed on an annual basis. In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions:
<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethical.shtml>.

APPROVED.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Valerie Thompson", written over a horizontal line.

Valerie Thompson, Chair
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan

Please send all correspondence to:

Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Room 306, Kirk Hall, 117 Science Place
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5C8
Phone: (306) 966-2084 Fax: (306) 966-2069